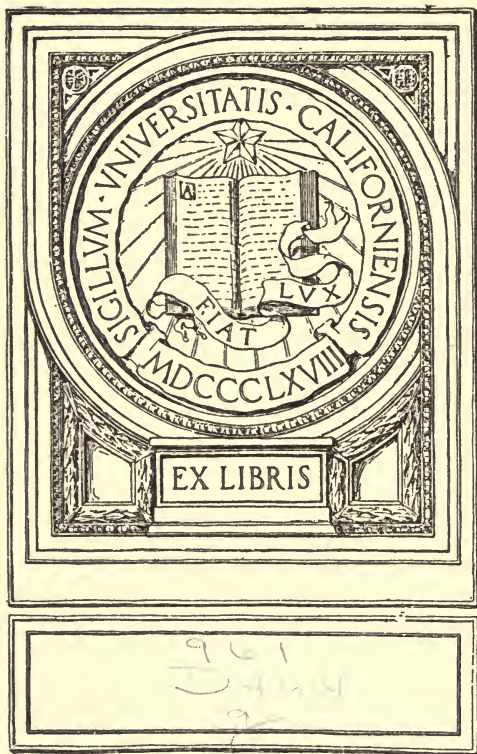


# GODS

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Shaw Desmond











*By the Same Author:*

*Novels:*

PASSION

DEMOCRACY

*Plays:*

MY COUNTRY

*Books of Travel, etc.:*

THE SOUL OF DENMARK

LABOUR: THE GIANT WITH THE

FEET OF CLAY

# GODS



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# G O D S

BY

SHAW DESMOND

*Library of  
Theological Studies*

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*To the Unknown God*

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PART I  
LONDON



# GODS

## I

### READING AND PRAYER

THE drone of his father's voice came to him where he knelt, losing itself in the zooming of the bee, a great velvety-backed fellow that clambered through the Maréchal Niel outside in the scented air of a London June, lulling him to sleep and to dreams.

"Oh God! have mercy upon us poor miserable sinners . . . have mercy . . . mercy. . . . Send down thy lightnings upon the stiff-necked and wicked. . . ."

The boy found himself checked into a consciousness through which began to steal, irrelevantly, questions—the questions he was beginning to ask "God." Who *was* God?

*Was He?*

The interrogation hooked itself incredibly into the entity that was Finn Fontaine, dragging him into full consciousness.

". . . save us from the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched. . . ."

He could see his father's trousers, of nondescript seediness, where he crouched small and shrunken before the Lord. Beyond, his mother, unyielding, held herself stiffly on the thin carpet. It was as though he had seen them for the first time. They were strangers—hostile.

But God?

There was the hairy sackclothed giant which had materialised in the twilight of babyhood, holding Itself aloof and menacing. *That* had never been his, though it had held itself, remote, bogeyish, through his seventeen years of life. . . .

But God?

There had been those others, those dark playmates of his dreams, sleeping and waking, friendly devils, great and tiny, who had flitted with him through the golden shadow of Adventureland. With them he had travelled the world around, scaling mountains, leaping precipices, hosting in enchanted castles. Or sometimes, lifting with them over its fleeting edge, he had seen it unroll beneath him where the lakes shone like mercury in the forests of night as he chased towards the sun of red copper that flaunted its first rays upwards over the rim of the darkened earth. Them he loved. . . .

But God?

There was the little Methodist chapel down the road with an Indweller, fiery, local, implacable, under whom his father cowered in those dismayed intervals when, to the disgust of his wife and the glory of God, he broke out from the great dead Church of the Established, which held itself in aristocratic segregation a little along the main road of the London suburb on the right hand side as you pass the painted sign of the "White Hart."

But God?

His eye, roving, caught the tiny heap of saintliness and frayed silk which was his grandmother and which bunched itself on its knees of eighty winters between its son and grandson in sweet humility. From where he knelt, his eye, peering through the loophole of thumb and forefinger, searched the network of indigo that veined itself over the diminutive gnarled hands where they pressed themselves against the eyes of china-blue, filmed by the tears of pity and age. Yes, perhaps *there* was God—the God of forgiveness and love—the God of childlike hymns and praiseful psalms quavered in gentle Irish trebles by a fragile figure which smiled to him in the mornings, minute on the high white altar of the bed, from the edge of which fell the three steps of ascent and descent.

But he was not the God of Father Lestrangle, the slender dark Jesuit of the rolling red-lit eye, who, mistaking him for a good Catholic, had visited him when he lay sick of the chicken-pox. That was another kind of God, a God of strange harshnesses and of as strange indulgences, a God for whom good and evil were the same.

Nor was he that gloomy exclusive devil of Mrs. Titterling, who concerned himself, alone of the sons of men, with the

Spirit's Elect—the God of a dreadful simplicity who, without blench, unvengeful, damned the race to torture eternal, plucking from their midst the preordained of the Elect—brands from the burning.

“Brands from the burning.” How often had he not been plucked from the burning by the God of his savings by grace—the taskmaster who alternately cajoled and terrorised his submission by burning fire and pearly gate. But God?

From the first floor came the tap-tap of the lodger's mallet. Ström, the Swedish sculptor, who worshipped a God so ineffably remote that He could not even be named. A nameless God.

But God?

*Where* was He? *Who* was He? *Why* was He?

*Was He at all?*

That was the interrogative to which he always came back.

“. . . and make us happy ever after for Christ's sake. Amen.”

His thoughts were broken by the pushing back of his father's chair as he rose from his knees after communion with infinity. He looked down at the little, shrunken head with its fringe of scanty beard and whisker out of which the eyes of liquid grey glanced at him puzzled, fleetingly, as though they were ashamed, in the way that they had; caught the stiff made tie of black silk through the straggling hair, the frock coat of Sunday's shabby gentility, the bagging of the foreshortened trousers which lifted themselves indecently over the bunions boots. He looked at his mother, the predominating partner by a head, in her Sabbath rigidity of watered silk, with the eyes of hard brown that gazed in truculent virtue out over his grandmother.



## II

### BITTER-BLACK

JAMES FONTAINE, or "Jemmy," as he was known to his mother and wife and to nobody else in the world, for he had few friends and no intimates, was a common soldier in that grey army of conformity—the London middle-middle class, the class of the little huckstering commission man, the clerk, and the counter-jumper—the army of the Unskilled.

Jemmy had learnt little about life and less from it. They had taught him in the schools of the nation to read a little, to write a little, to cipher a little—his duty towards his God, whom he knew intimately, and towards his neighbour, whom he did not know at all, and turned out the finished article at the age of fourteen or so to be a credit to itself and to its country in a world of Free Competition and Pure Religion. There were also educational frills in respect of one's duty to one's betters.

The Finished Article did its best. That is to say, it was flung neck and crop into the tin tacks and 'orneriness of a hardware house in the Borough, whence it emerged, slightly dishevelled as to moral and pocket, some three years afterwards, to be precipitated through a series of experiences of a uniformity calculated to destroy any belief in human nature it might originally have possessed, and Jemmy Fontaine was a man of incredible belief and of as incredible suspicion. It was not that Jemmy was unsteady—the whole bent of his nature and upbringing was "the safe job," but he had an Irishwoman for a mother, and when a man has an Irishwoman for a mother he is apt to develop a jumpiness that defies even the calculation of a London Cockney father. Finally, he had brought up in "commissions."

Finn, who to his father was as astonishing as though he had generated an archangel and who kept him in a state that

alternated between shock and stupefaction, knew nothing of the above—indeed he knew nothing at all about his father except that his name had been Fountain, and that his mother, who in these things was sphinx-like, had issued a sort of ukase under which, accompanied by the superfluity of Letters Patent, it had been changed to Fontaine. “Fontainebleau, near Paris, you know,” she would say in polite deprecation.

It seemed that his uncle Jasper, a red hot democrat from New York, feeling the need of blood for the dilution of a fortune acquired under Tammany, had made a search through the College of Heralds, who, for a consideration, provided him with a remotely unimpeachable Huguenot ancestry. His mother had even considered the possibilities of *la* Fontaine, but Jemmy, for the first and only time in his married life, had kicked at the “la.” He said it was “a bit too thick,” he could not swallow it.

Finn had not only had to swallow the Fontaine, but “Finn Nathaniel Cuthey” on the top of it. His mother had been a Miss Cuthey, the daughter of an apothecary in a Nottinghamshire village, with tendencies to self-annihilation which had matured whilst Fanny Cuthey was still in short frocks.

“Never forget you are a Cuthey,” she would say to Finn, who had no difficulty in the matter as he had been daily reminded of it over a period of years by his schoolmates who addressed him as “Cuthey” and as nothing else. The “Nathaniel” had been the solitary green twig of his mother’s imagination, but the “Finn” was the contribution of his grandmother, who, Irish to her last hair, had, from the day he was born, told Finn the story and the stories of Ireland, not forgetting his immortal namesake. “We had Finns in the family,” said she, “when Noah was a boy—and wasn’t the great Finn MacCoul himself wan o’ thim. What more d’ye want?” The argument was of course unanswerable.

The boy watched his father this Saturday afternoon “doing” his coal accounts in the little back room which was half office, half eating room—the front room being sacred to “visits” and Sunday. Despite the sun outside, the place was not so dark as a coal cellar and nearly as cool. The little figure in its office coat of black alpaca was buried in a mass of yellow circulars which fluttered autumnally to the carpet when it moved its elbows. He could almost read the bold, lying print which

announced to a world indifferent under the July suns, that "Martyr and MacGlusky's coals kept the Empire warm." He could see the nice distinction which separated the definiteness of Extra-Special from "Specials," a plural of non-committal, and Super-Cookers from Ordinary Nuts. He knew them by heart and so, although too far away to read the hateful characters, he followed the thin line down to the exhaustion of "Good Black House."

His mother crocheted inflexibly under the little French folding doors which gave access to the skimpy garden and the only light to the room, placing at intervals a hard brown eye upon her husband's bald patch.

"Goodness gracious! who can it be now?"

The bell-pull always made Mrs. Fontaine jerky. Finn, who acted as maid on these occasions, glimpsed with foreboding the shadow that showed itself through the muslin remnant which screened the semi-detachment of Ash Villa from a curious suburbdom. High and thin and forbidding it hooked itself into the corner of the door opening. "I'm coming in—it's no good, you can't keep me out!" it seemed to say.

And come in it did, with the scarecrow hat pierced by the Choctaw feathers a little askew on the iron-grey tresses under which the eyes stood black, arresting, its high pinched shoulders cribbed by the black silk elbow cape, its hands and lower arms gauntleted in black kid. Its right hand gripped an umbrella which had for its handle an idol-like figure of a sneering ferocity.

It was only after Aunt Bella had passed him in the narrow hall that Finn discovered, crouching under her lee, his aunt Maria, whose flabbiness under the concrete of her sister took a consistency which left her as nearly invisible as no matter. Aunt Maria had one good eye and one doubtful, over the latter of which an eyelid would drop without warning, leaving the semi-eclipsed orb to roll whitely and despairing, and giving her a rather blackguardly expression that belied her real nature, for Aunt Maria was a simple soul.

"It's the day after to-morrow and the General himself will be in command, with Mr. Pickles, the American Revivalist. Pickles says he's going to give them h—" . . . she paused for a moment in her impetuous passage through the little room into which she had talked her way, circled a trifle, and then, as

though overmastered by something driving at her from the inside, finished the word she had begun. . . . "hell!" she said as though she had exploded in the lower deeps. The white jagged scar which ran from eye corner to mouth corner twitched.

Aunt Maria's eye rolled piously and doubtfully at Finn.

"R-r-really, Bella!" said Mrs. Fontaine coldly expostulating. Her husband's frightened face showed itself over his elbow for a moment.

"I tell you what it is, Fanny—what you and your Established lot need is plain speech . . . and so does *your* canting congregation. . . ." She turned for a moment fiercely upon her fat sister, who wilted slightly.

"Do you know 'The Bells of the Monastery,' Finn?" Aunt Maria asked suddenly.

"Don't try to be diplomatic, Maria," said Bella. . . . "Plain speech," she went on. "Was it not Isaiah who said: 'I have come to curse, not to bless—to damn, not to save?'" for she had a tendency in her more exalted moments to become slightly blasphemic and to misquote scripture to her own ends and the glory of God. "And the General is a second Isaiah," she continued. "He is an instrument—an instrument—a mouthpiece."

Mrs. Fontaine looked contemptuously at her sister. "How old-fashioned you are, Bella! People don't speak about . . ." she hesitated a trifle ". . . hell in these days . . . and such places. The Bishop never does."

"The Bishop!" erupted her sister. "The Bishop!" A man of wrath. An apostate. A brand for the burning. His lordship of Whitechapel." She laughed.

The laugh jarred Finn even though the Bishop of Whitechapel had been one of his disappointments. Dr. Goodheart had not only confirmed him but had helped to prepare him for the ceremony in the Forestford church. He could see now the bewildered good-natured face in its halo of whisker, and the bewilderment which had taken a deeper shade as Finn had gradually transformed from the questioned into the questioner, his lordship, too ingenuous to be ingenious, tying himself into a series of theological knots which left him helpless in the slightly ridiculous way that had made Finn feel mean.

"But one dare not question those things," he had said, and

then, more weakly. . . . "they never used to be questioned." Then he had looked at the long shearing nose, the green rather angry eyes, and the small pugnacious ears with the queer upper-lobe depressions of the boy before him, and had been silent.

But his mother with the acquisitiveness which made her determined to get anything that might be going, either in this world or the next, had spurred the 15-year doubter to the altar, where he found himself in a tight pair of new brown boots and a bristle of hair that refused to be soothed by olive oil. Both the bishop and his mother had assured him of the solemn investiture of the ceremony, the latter hinting, in response to the demand for theological concreteness, at what she called "possession," and so he had waited, hoping against hope. He had felt the gentle hands upon his head, had held his breath. . . . and then had relapsed into the torture of the boots and a deeper scepticism.

And now he sat looking at the woman who had laughed. He knew her history. A spoiled beauty who had thrown her suitors away like used dish-clouts—an ugly accident—and then obliteration. The acid of years—the dangerous age of Indian summer in which a High-church parson had unwittingly helped her to find a heart and with it a passion of religion in the Establishment—love's labour lost—hate—and then the plunge into Methodism and hell-fire.

That unreasoning irritation with his family gathered within him like a poisonous secretion. He could see the God of Aunt Bella, a sort of anthropomorphic god of leather mouth and brazen lung who prayed, praised, and damned—and there was his father's, a variation of Aunt Bella's, but a snob—and his mother's, who was all snob. The God of his Aunt Maria, as that of his grandmother, he could not see, though the God of Father Lestrangle was definite—a fierce dark man of tanned face and haunting smile which came and went under the flickering fires of the open pit before him, whilst above a galaxy of saints and angels set golden in the tenuous blue of the starry firmament. He could never separate the Jesuit from his God—in a sense they were one and the same thing.

He was pulled up by a knock at the street door, which Aunt Maria, who seemed to want to get out of the room, went to open. There fell a sudden silence as the dark full tones



came from the passage, the closing of the door into the little drawing-room, and then Aunt Maria, breathless, to tell them that Father Lestrangle was in the next room.

"The Scarlet Woman," said Aunt Bella.

Then the exodus—his mother at the head, with Aunt Bella on her heels, his father struggling into his second best jacket as he went out with Aunt Maria panting behind, and then the little grandmother bobbing serenely along. It was as though something were drawing them irresistibly.

The tall man with the dark hair rolling over the high forehead which showed white against the tan of his face, stood gravely to receive them, bowing ceremoniously to Mrs. Fontaine, taking in her sister Bella with the corner of an eye not altogether unfriendly and Jemmy with a warm handshake, which he extended to Finn with his left as to an old comrade. Then, with an encouraging nod to Aunt Maria who was trying, and vainly, to obliterate herself behind her sister, he went over to the little silvery grandmother, smiling beautifully to her as he hid the old lady's tiny hands in his big brown ones, passed one of them through his arm, and led her in state to the arm-chair in the corner, the little woman smiling up at him, confiding, like a child, as he did so.

"Ah, Father," said she, "but you have the beautiful way wide ye. 'Tis you that are too good to a poor old heretic like meself."

"There are heretics and heretics and Catholics and Catholics, my dear madam, and I think that some day you will find prepared for you a place not far from the Lady whom we Catholics love and honour above all others." There came that all-understanding smile to the high dark face and the red lights to the eyes, like little tongues of flame, which then extinguished.

"Compromise!" ejaculated Aunt Bella triumphantly. She had been moving uneasily from one foot to another like a boxer waiting a chance to dart in. "And you call yourself a good Catholic, Father Lestrangle. I thought your Church never compromised."

"Upon the unessentials, my dear madam, the unessentials. . . . There is so much that is unessential," he continued absently. "Compromise is the essential of all religion as of all deviltry. We must compromise."

"But not with the devil."

"It is especially with Sathanas that the Church has to compromise. If the Church didn't compromise it would never win souls. Even the devil must have his due, Miss Cuthey. Poor devil!"

The glittering eyes were fixed upon the priest's as those of a bird on a snake's. Like so many others, Aunt Bella could never make up her mind whether to hate or love the Jesuit.

"I believe you are the devil's advocate," she snapped at last.

"You pay me too great honour, madam, when you make me *Advocatus Diaboli*. His Majesty has at his command kings and princes, prime ministers and bishops, and brains like that of Mr. Paris Asthar. No, I do not deserve the honour." He bowed in tender irony as he rolled the "r's" softly.

Jemmy Fontaine looked from one to the other, frightened at all this diabolical conversation, his wife with an underground smile at her sister's claw-clipping.

"We are all going on Monday to the Tabernacle on Kingsway Waste to hear General Bliss and Billy Pickles, the American evangelist, Father Lestrangle. Won't you join us?" She looked at him poisonously.

"Speak for yourself, Bella," said Mrs. Fontaine with dignity and slightly glancing at the priest. "I never promised anything of the kind. Jemmy and I are Church."

"No, he's not," said Bella, "he's chapel at heart."

Jemmy Fontaine smiled nervously.

"Jemmy's Church of England," said his wife, decisively. Her husband's lips quivered in mute protest. There were heroic moments in Jemmy's life.

The Jesuit looked at the little man with that beautiful, sad smile that brought to Finn, sitting behind, a picture of the Jesus he had seen in a visit of solitary adventure to the National Gallery. It was called "The Man of Compassion." He felt a sympathy with his father, unexpected.

"And as I suppose Finn is also Church of England, he won't be able to come either." There was something deliberate in Father Lestrangle's voice as he looked at Finn. The boy felt something rise within him as he caught the priest's eye.

"Yes," said his mother complacently, "Finn is a good Churchman. Aren't you Finn?"

The priest still looked at the boy, who sat there, sullen, the long strong nose challenging; the ears setting themselves a trifle too closely to the large, well-balanced head.

"You're not afraid to answer, Finn, are you?" The priest said it easily enough, but there was something mocking, challenging, in the eyes that stared at the boy.

The green eyes kindled. It was as though the look had brought him to ignition.

"No!" said the boy, and shut his jaws like a trap.

"What do you mean Finn!" His mother stared at him, incredulous. "You know you believe in the Church. . . ."

"And Christianity," said the Father, still with that smile.

"I don't know what I believe!"

"Finn!"

"The boy is mad!"

"Atheist!"

"Monster!" This last from Aunt Bella.

They gazed at him as though they saw him already within the mouth of the pit, his father with slackened jaw, from which trickled a thin, bewildered stream—all except Father Le-strange.

There came a chuckle from the door, around the edge of which a great nose showed itself, trembling.

Aunt Judy had, as was her custom, stolen in the back way without knocking and had been listening. Aunt Judy had been and still was the ugly duckling of the Cutheys, the despised of all and the hated of Bella the beauty who took her ugliness as a sort of physical affront. Aunt Judy had been born with a brain in which some turn of filament had banished from her mind the power to believe, and given, in its stead, the desire, a desire which had grown in strength and hopelessness with years. She had passed from congregation to congregation in her quest, and at present was in the throes of the Spirit's Elect.

She came into the room, her head covered by a high round hat which set itself over her nose, trembling as though it were hung on wires, the all-mended clothes of her poverty hanging from the angles of her frame, the yellow goat-like eyes looking from face to face as though seeking something.

As her eyes met those of the priest, they smiled, and it was strange how one forgot the grotesqueness in the smile. He took

her warmly by the hand and led her to a corner where she sat, sideways, her great nose resting against the wall paper, to laugh there heartbrokenly from time to time and to draw upon herself the contemptuous sniff of her sister Bella, who had always hated her ugliness from the days when they had been children together.

"He doesn't believe," said Mrs. Fontaine as though there had been no interruption. "He doesn't believe!" She pointed vacantly at Finn who now sat, silent, after his outburst.

"The *Zeitgeist*," said the priest, smiling. "The spirit of the time. The spirit of flux." There was a subtle triumph in the voice.

"The bad Irish in him," said Finn's mother, vaguely.

The priest smiled beautifully. "I am an Irishman myself," he said.

"His speech bewrayeth him," murmured Aunt Maria, who had a natural aversion to Irishmen, arising partly from a confused notion as to their Church's association with the Scarlet Woman. The doubtful eye, flickering, uncertain, looked at him as though he were the devil as she pressed herself behind her sister Bella, some pounds, however, exuding on either side.

"But I will come with you all on Friday night," said Father Lestrangle, "and meet the General and Mr. Pickles, who I believe is generally known as Hell Fire Billy. Bliss and Pickles sound like an excellent mixture."

He paused a moment, stared at the boy, and said: "Finn, I am ashamed of you!"

They all seemed to breathe more freely when he had gone.

### III

#### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF JEMMY FONTAINE

JEMMY FONTAINE stood in the hall of Ash Villa, suffering the ministrations of his wife, who was preening him for the day's adventure.

And it *was* an adventure—a very desperate breaking away from the beaten paths beloved of Jemmy and his kind.

"For coals were, in the words of the unredeemable MacGlusky, a Scotsman who blended his theology with his whisky to the disadvantage of the former, "going to hell," where, as he remarked, "nobody wanted them."

Jemmy had been warned that the London suburb of Forestford was a part of that Empire which was warmed by Martyr and MacGlusky, and when he had inserted humbly something about a combination of "slack" and "hot weather," and a fainter "short weight," the MacGlusky had replied through his whiskers: "We ken a' about that story—ye can tell *that* to the Auld Lichts." The terrible Mac, himself recusant from the sect of the Auld Lichts, now hated them with a devastating hate and quoted them on all occasions to ignorant Sas-senachs who believed him really to be referring to a South Sea tribe or something of that kind.

So Jemmy was about to try soap—"Beauty Soap," as the angelic figures of a transparent sexlessness which lost itself in the rosy dawns of the pictures which filled his bag, advertised to a sceptical and unwashed world. "You buy 10 lbs. of Beauty and you get your photograph enlarged." There on the rickety hall chair reclined the pattern enlarged lady herself, with features of a regularity incredible and a downcast eye, who seemed to feel her position acutely. It was the lady to whom, in the days that followed, when she had been hung on the walls of Ash Villa, Mrs. Fontaine referred distinctly to visitors as "a distant relation."

Mrs. Fontaine moved around him uneasily, dabbing with

the clothes brush at the lapels of his frock coat, greened under the suns of many summers. The trousers she left alone—they were past brushing, but to the top hat which under the vain imagining of Mr. Fontaine “impressed the customers,” she devoted a torn silk handkerchief with which she repeatedly caressed its fuzzy rebellion. Like her husband, Mrs. Fontaine was a hopeless optimist.

But it was the boots that were Jemmy’s eternal problem, a problem to which during his quarter of a century’s pilgrimages on commission he had given something like the same attention that had enabled Napoleon to carry through one of his victorious campaigns. It was that other soldier of fortune who said that an army marches on its belly, but Jemmy knew better—he knew that it marched on its boots. A fickle nature had bestowed on Jemmy a pair of odd sizes in feet, which as the years progressed had, under the influence of cheap boots and bunions, developed a tendency to become out-sizes. So it was that Jemmy had been compelled to slash his infrequent boots with surgical accuracy surprising, in order to “ease” the bunions which erupted through the interstices, and as Jemmy’s mother had always made him wear white woollen socks, the result was striking.

Sometimes a pen and ink camouflaged the more flagrant eruptions, but this did not help much. The situation was further complicated by a perfect Vesuvius on the little toe which could not be eased because it was below water level, and by Mr. Blakey, who placed his boot protectors on the soles of Jemmy Fontaine’s aching feet, bringing up those soft corns upon which he wasted, as his wife said, enough new beefsteak soaked in vinegar to keep a family.

The feet of Jemmy Fontaine were in fact a problem to the insolubility of which each of the four seasons made its contribution of heat or moisture.

You see him as his wife gives him the final touches, trimming a corner of his cuff here, running the back of her thumb nail along his collar there (Jemmy had a weakness for high collars which ate into the softer parts of his neck), and pushing into his left hand breast pocket the original of the enlarged lady, who still gazed obstinately downwards as she retired into her brown paper envelope and was tucked away under Jemmy’s right arm.



You see him with the glazed bag a trifle down by the stern with Beauty and a bit of dinner, as, having been pecked perfunctorily by the partner of his fortunes, he sets out down the dusty road under the premonitory sting of the June sun, still echoing his wife's parting admonition: "Whatever you do, don't part your coat at the back when you sit down because of that patch!" and, fainter, the verse he had read out that morning at reading and prayer: "Not one sparrow shall fall to the ground . . . not one. . . ."

This day there was an unusual palpitation in his hands, his feet, and even his throat, the tremblement that always came to Jemmy Fontaine when breaking new ground. It was the tremblement of the gambler. Somewhere out there in the grey immensity about him, veiled in the morning haze, Fortune waited for him to touch, unknowing, the hem of her garment. The grey eyes searched wistfully from the top of the tram towards the smudge of houses that reached out from the welter behind him to gather him in. Trot—trot—trot. Ting—a—ling—a—ling. The toy tram, brave in its green and gold, drawn by the horses which had not turned into the twentieth century soon to dawn, became a triumphal car, its tinkling bells the bells of fairyland. In his agitation, Jemmy forgot his wife's injunction and parted his coat tails shamelessly.

That this neighbourhood was a regular Tom Tiddler's Ground he had been told by an optimistic liar in oleographs whose broken nose and baggy trousers he had met in one of his coal sallies. The nose very much on one side, the eyes just clearing the brim of the bowler, had said: "You've only got to pick it up, guv'nor—they fair cast it at you. I did thirty-two 'Heart's Dilemmas' and fourteen 'Appy Mounting 'Omes' the fust day—and just look at me after a week." He had then, in his own words, "touched" Jemmy for a shilling on the strength of the tip and had sent him on his way suspicious but believing.

The haze had been eaten up by the sun as the green and gold, its glories dimming under the Sahara thrown up by the horses, trotted its way into the first of the long gullets of brick and mortar lying whitey-grey in the dust of the London June day. Jemmy felt his way carefully down the winding stair as the tram pulled up at "The Old Girl at Home," the brasses and gilding of whom stared the sun itself out of countenance like the brazen hussy she was. Somewhere a piano

organ was playing that popular refrain—"The Man that Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo," trailing off the melody in runs of brassy virtuosity.

Mr. Fontaine faced around the corner into the first of the Kitchener and Wolseley and Victoria streets. The new suburb was both loyal and martial. That it needed soap was obvious.

It was with a compression of the heart-strings that Jemmy knocked at his first door, after loosing the catch of the glazed bag to stand it, invitingly ajar, on the doorstep and half drawing the enlarged lady from her brown paper with the diminutive original clasped in the left hand to prison the eye that opened.

But no eye appeared. The little twenty-pound a-year was as fast bolted, banned, and barred as any castle of them all.

That "Englishman's home is his castle," of which Jemmy despite his Irish blood had boasted in moments of imperial pridefulness after reading it each morning in "The Earth," the authoritative halfpenny, which occupied a place a little lower than the angels of the Bible that was his only other mental nutriment—took a new significance, especially after, the sun getting up and the morning drawing on, he found other Englishmen's homes in the bricks and mortar that seemed to wrap itself, labyrinthine, about him.

Gaining courage with the despair which was beginning to haunt the pit of his stomach like a seasickness, Jemmy would knock again and yet again at these fastnesses, even going the length of peering from the twelve by four front garden into the Holy of Holies screened by the same starched curtains, before which the Lower Middle Class had erected its altar—the waxen apple; the stuffed bird; the plaster statue; all chastely encased in glass and standing upon the altar cloth of the antimacassar. And behind, dimly, its fantasy run riot in the chairs of red velvet, the bric-à-brac of the mantelshelf, and the "Heart's Dilemmas" and "Happy Mountain Homes" of the man with the broken nose.

Not that all the doors were adamantine.

Sometimes a small child would appear, upon whose dirty head Jemmy would expend his blandishments, partly for business purposes (he had come to be a perfect Machiavelli, had Jemmy) but partly from nature. Once, after a prolonged salvo



on the knocker, treading on the heels of several shorter ones, the door had opened without warning, disclosing to the dismayed Jemmy the enraged and hairy-breasted owner in open shirt, trousers, and bare feet, and, without parley, had as suddenly shut with a report like a gun. Some let themselves ajar and as silently closed—some gaped at him: "Now then, wot is it *this* time!" Some were kind, but had no money; others may have had the money but certainly were unkind. And one—the one that had made him flush with shame—had offered him a cup of tea. The refusal that met the offer had a dignity of its own which impressed the giver to say, apologetic, that she had only done it "for Christ's sake," which but added insult to injury—for Jemmy was, in his own way, as proud as Lucifer.

But there was the meeting in the Tabernacle that evening which somehow kept him going. It was an escape though he did not know it. Jemmy Fontaine never did know anything.

If anybody had told Jemmy Fontaine he was a hero, he would have been much surprised. But nobody did so. There were so many other Jemmies, only separated from him by a line of houses, tramping the labyrinth about him, caught like him in something not to be understood and therefore not to be thought about.

The piano organ which had been tracking him during the morning and the strains of which, fleeting, had come to him over the intervening roofs, now met him festively as he turned into the Gladys Road. The organist, an ingratiating moustached alien, turning his handle to the children who garlanded him, was grinding out "The Man Who Broke the Bank" to the shrill of their voices:

"As I walked along the Continong with a hindependent air,  
 You can 'ear the girls declare  
 'E must be a millionaire.  
 And then they sigh and wish to die,  
 And then they wink the other eye. . . .

and then the triumphant——

"For I'm the Man that Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo!"

There was a light and shine with the dancing singing children under the sun beat, which, with the words, seemed to mock him as he faltered there with his bag and picture. His legs

trembled under him and the place seemed to turn round. He could do no more.

Jemmy Fontaine swallowed his pride and sat down on the nearest doorstep, watching the children as they danced, and whilst they danced, the organ man and the pease pudding house behind him and the street seemed to dance too.

It came to Jemmy that it must be want of food. He opened the black bag and felt for the packet of boiled beef sandwiches now disintegrating. He inserted the first and second fingers of his right hand into the paper packet without taking it from the bag in a vain attempt to secure edible morsels without being observed by the passers by, but with indifferent success, as the bread broke in his hand, whilst the beef held. Tearing the wrapping in his desperation, he did manage to secure a triple alliance of meat, bread, and paper, which he passed furtively to his mouth, for Jemmy had the instinct which the middle-class shares with the Indian and the dog, that there is something of disgrace in the act of eating. The dessication of the crumbs choked him, nor could any moistening of his parched lips and throat bring the needful lubrication. After a time he gave it up, the last unswallowed morsel resting pensively in his mouth, the eye, wandering, catching the words above the window of the Pudding Shop:

“A Good Pull-up for Carmen,”

hovered a moment and then fell fatefully to the sprawl of letter across the window beneath:

“Pudding—Spotted 2d., Plain 1d.”

The eye lighted. Jemmy liked pudding.

He knew it was quite indefensible to Fanny, who had packed the beef sandwiches as prophylactic against exactly such temptation, just as she had placed six pennies in his pocket against remoter contingency. He knew that the conscience which was the terror of his life would prod him later in his tenderer spots. He knew he shouldn't. But he did.

The gentleman behind the bar was consideration itself. The quiff of plastered hair, the dark humoursome eyes, and the white apron with the yellow blotches, came forward over the high counter to greet the unusual apparition of a customer in a high hat. Behind, the Pudding steamed yeastily. There

were two piles, one with plums and one without, or, as the window truly said, one spotted and one plain.

Two smaller piles stood at the side. They did not steam. They were cold and clammy with something of the day before about them.

"Good arternoon, guv'nor, an' wot may I 'ave the pleasure of doing for you?"

Jemmy, fascinated, looked through him at the pudding behind. But he did not forget the condescension of the middle-class to pudding.

"Thought I'd try twopennorth for fun. Haven't eaten it since I was a boy." He smiled weakly.

The gentleman with the quiff understood. He was a man of lightning comprehensions born of emergency extraordinary.

"Quite understand, guv'nor. Old times' sake as you might sye. 'Ere," expansively, as he turned to the smoking piles behind, "we 'ave two kinds—spotted and plain. Penny plain-tuppence spotted—and worth the money. W'ch shall it be guv'nor? Sye the word."

Jemmy looked at the sickliness of the penny pile, did a lightning calculation in which "twice 1 are 2" and "1 from 6 leaves nearly 6" figured, passed to the spots that mellowed the other pile, and fell.

"Spotted," he said, almost inaudible.

"Cold or 'ot?" went on the barman, now warming to his work.

"Hot," said Jemmy, moving uneasily from one foot to another on the high stool upon which he crouched monkey-like under the counter.

"With cruet or without?" continued the affable gentleman behind the counter, now really enthusiastic, his arms akimbo.

Jemmy made a final effort at gentlemanly control just as the scent of the hot pudding caught his nostrils, forgot himself, and broke down desperately:

"Oh gi'me the pudding. I don't care how it is. I'm hungry."

The man of quick decisions saw it was no case for parley, drove his spoon into the heart of the smoking heap, slapped it on a plate and the plate before the customer. Jemmy, perched on the high stool, his coat tails shamelessly exposing the lozenge patch, ate. The hat gradually worked itself off the fore-

head that looked as though it had been beaten, the head shrinking into one great maw down which the pudding was pushed. The lady, half out of her envelope, lay indifferently under the counter in virtuous abandonment, the bag gaped unheeding. James Fontaine was only a mouth and a stomach.

Out again into that terrible sun—but now with hope and waistcoat distended. Still the sun beat fiercely, mercilessly, on his rusty hat, parching his throat, sapping his strength, and making him, at the length of the street, falter again. The pavements were his tormentors and he thought vaguely about hell.

As he tramped up one street and down the next, the hat lolled itself over one ear, the glazed bag sagging at a derelict angle, and the enlarged lady going down by the head. But still he set his face towards the Unknown Goal, the eyes dim but unfaltering, upheld by that dogged, invincible, little-huckster's faith in something he knew not what. As he plodded on the feet through which the pavements stabbed like glowing coals, there came to him, as was the way, the texts he had learned from his pushing, religious, Cockney father . . . "putting your hand to the plough," and "enduring to the end," but through it all there recurred, irrelevant, the verse of the morning: "Not one sparrow shall fall to the ground. . . ." "Not one sparrow . . . not one. . . ." It repeated itself mechanically. But it was all so confused. Even Fortune seemed very far away. Heaven and hell were the only definitenesses.

The feet dragged away down the length of the streets that stretched themselves into the far away, the rusty hat setting itself towards the westering sun now flooding them with golden dust. But still the feet, the picture, and the bag went on as the shadows began to steal out—down the length of the streets to be lost in the forgetfulness of the evening.

Not one sparrow . . . not one sparrow . . . not one. . . .

## IV

### BLOOD AND FIRE

THERE was a nudity about the erection that was shocking. It stood there, galvanised, utilitarian, stark. About the lofty barnlike doors which gaped for the masses that streamed within, there was something as uncompromising as Moloch. Ominous under the setting sun, it loomed gigantic from the waste of rubble about it, the high façades of the houses that framed it casting their shadows to its base and over its roof. The two gas-flares that hung above wasted themselves palely against the ruddy sky.

The vulgar called it the Tin Tabernacle.

Finn was sucked with the rest into the maw of the place, which, under the infrequent electric pears, each hanging nakedly on its filament, spread vastly into the side aisles, whilst in the distance, where a solitary light glimmered, could be sensed a hollow of seats that yawned to the roof—before them a square roped stage with something hanging darkly over it.

From where they sat in the middle front, Finn looked back over the seats to the red sky that poured through the doors in a bloody mist, turning the lines of red-clothed seats into slaughter benches. Father Lestrangle had also turned, the red light playing, as Finn always saw it play in his dreams, on the dark face which gazed out over the people through the doors. His father and aunts were crouched over the leaflets with which the benches were strewn. His mother looked superior. As he glanced at her, that prickly heat of unreasoning irritation overwhelmed him. It made him ashamed of himself.

The cavern of a place echoed to the low thunder of the boots upon the boarded floor, as though they had been the hoofs of driven cattle. Shadows were moving up there on the semi-circle of seats. As the place filled and the light died from the sky, the thunder had fallen into the tapping of the last arrivals,

until even this had ceased. The great doors clanged. The iron maw was full.

Out of the opacity about them there came a whispering like the rustling of leaves, the faces showing pallid under the half lights. Something moved on the square of the high staging. The whispering had died away. There was a silence scarcely to be endured.

A trumpet note rang out. The faces strained upwards as though it had been the blast of Gabriel. They might have been rising from their graves.

A flash of light struck blinding upon the high sacrificial stage with its scarlet pillars and white ropes. A thin high-shouldered, uniformed figure stood there alone.

There was something bird-like in the close-set eyes, in the nose that hooked itself from between them, in the grip of the hands that clawed the ropes. But there was something prophetic too in the sweep of the long white beard and the hair that tumbled itself back in snowy masses over the skull ridge and behind the long flat ears.

The figure stood unmoved under the broad band of white linen that stretched from wall to wall, on it in letters of scarlet: "BLOOD AND FIRE."

It stood unmoved as the growl of drum from the massed bands under its feet rose steadily into a thund'rous crescendo that swung from iron wall to iron wall as though giants were playing at bowls up there on the roof, punctuated by the thin artillery of tambourine from the background of poke bonnets that filled the concave behind. The long thin hand had lifted, pointing to the inscription above, until the last reverberation had died away under the iron roof.

"To the glory of God! Blood and Fire!"

The voice, in it something thin and high-shouldered, pierced the silence.

And once more. . . .

"To the glory of God!"

The hand had fallen, and with it the darkness. A single beam of light had slanted across the heads of the multitude against the white screen with the black lettering:

#### THE GLORY SONG.

From the darkness behind, a soprano stole its way, sweetly,



assuredly, into the farthest corners of the building. There was a moment of silence, and now the invisible singer was singing the refrain that echoed in straining sweetness:

Oh that will be,  
                   Glory for me.  
 Oh that will be,  
                   Glory for me.  
 When by His grace, I shall look on His face,  
                   That will be glory, be glory for me!

There came a trembling in the air, that trembling which Finn had once felt at the Elevation of the Host in the Catholic chapel into which he had one day ventured at Westminster. The Tabernacle had thrilled as though some living Presence were passing. A moment, and the low thunder of ten thousand throats followed, rising higher, ever higher, until they drowned the clang of brass and roll of drum which had now joined in.

There was a terror about this massed singing that sent the music stealing through his veins like liquid fire. Then he discovered that he too was singing:

Oh that will be,  
                   Glory for me.  
 Oh that will be,  
                   Glory for me.

That will be glory, be glory for me!

He was borne upwards and outwards upon the gigantic egotism of the song into something that had in it nothing of self. To him, as perhaps to those others about him, there came the desire to save the world—that desire which sometimes came to him as an expansion of spirit, a turning outwards of self to envelop the world—an insensate desire to love all people and all things, even evil itself. It shone in the liquid-grey of his father's eyes, which, as the lights once more flared out, stared awed at the figure inside the ropes; in the blackness of the eyes of his Aunt Bella who, if she could not save the world, would destroy it by that blood and fire of which they had been singing. It shone in the eyes of those about him—a dim reaching out to an unknown goal—as unconscious as instinct, but as deep.

Perhaps the world was divided into the people with the desire—that was the "Propagandists"—and the "Indifferents." It

was the thing that united Father Lestrangle, Mrs. Titterling, Aunt Bella, and the General. Even his mother, because of that desire, seemed to take a lesser rigidity.

Only the Jesuit sat unmoved, the lofty forehead holding itself remote from everything there. There were moments in which Finn almost hated the priest. This was one of them.

The boy's eye, searching the spaces about him, stopped as he listened to the General, who was now reading out a list of subscriptions from a paper which he held:

"Samuel B. Hodge, Esquire—£500.

"The Right Honourable Lord Kilmainham—£250."

("God be praised!" in a deep bass from one of the side aisles.)

Finn, looking for the voice, found instead a face known to half the world in general and himself in particular, where its owner sat just inside the whited circle of the arc-lights, behind it, the hall in deep shadow. The skull sloping thinly to the nape of the neck, showed anatomised under its yellow hairless pelt as though it were the skull of a mummy, the ears pitting themselves deep, the forehead high and swelling. The rat-trap jaw under that dome showed small but set to ear and neck as though it were metallised and fitted by a surgeon, matching the big acquisitive mouth filled with artificial teeth. The nose, deep-based, ran short and sheer down the face and broke off cancerously above the long bulbous upper lip like the nose of the statue of a Roman boxer Finn had seen at the British Museum. The eyes of stone were those of the statue.

"John L. Crux—£5,000."

The poke bonnets had sprung into life—the concavity had become a frenzy of white handkerchief, and then the tambourines had sent out spray on spray of sound like the breaking of glass, above the undertow of the big drum, through which cut the shrill of female voices:

"Hallelujah!"

"Glory, glory!"

And then the bass:

"Glory to God! John L. Crux, Unlimited!"

It was the popular title of the great money machine in which Finn was an unconsidered cog. The machine man him-



self sat there before him without the flicker of an eyelid—by his side, the lank spade jaw of his son Parker, smooth-faced and groomed to the last hair. But Parker's eye flickered with satisfaction. "John L. Crux, Unlimited—£5,000." A thin tongue moistened furtively the thinner lips.

Finn knew that the Tabernacle's revival meetings were frequented by statesmen and bishops, artists and men of the world, someone even had said, by royalty—the General at any rate had once been invited to the Palace and had rewarded his host by praying for him—but he had not expected to see the man of millions. Yet he knew that John L. Crux in his own way was fanatic, with perhaps a heaven as narrow and a hell as capacious as those of General Bliss. But the American never showed himself to the public, to whom he was more a name than a person. "John L. Crux, Unlimited," as he and his business were known to the world.

By now the General, like the enthusiasm, had come down to the half guineas. He stopped.

This man knew the use of the silence. Every eye slewed once more to the roped platform.

"We are going to have a round with the Devil to-night, comrades. The Cross is our symbol. A symbol of power. And in that sign shall we triumph."

This anyhow was the veriest blatancy—the claptrap of fanaticism. Many there, like Finn himself, breathed the freer for it, shaking themselves from the miasma rising about them. This, at any rate, ought to be resultless.

But it wasn't. They might call it nonsense. But it did not *feel* like nonsense. There was something behind that made them uneasy—weighted it.

"Our champion is here—the man who has fought for the devil in many a roped square is going to knock him out to-night. A fight to a finish."

"To-night is challenge night. You know the terms of the challenge—they are printed on your leaflets—they stood in the advertisement columns of the press to-day. Anyone can accept the challenge—prince or pauper—bishop or atheist—five minutes and five minutes' reply. Or, as Billy Pickles would say—five minute rounds. Or, if you like, blow for blow—question and answer. The Lord is on our side!" The eyes twinkled a moment, then set.

“Hell Fire Billy!”

The lights beat on the white ropes as a high sinewy man, of immense shoulder-spread, in a loose-fitting suit of tweed which could not conceal the ripple of muscle underneath, ran along the floor to the steps leading upwards, and sprang loosely into the square.

“Time!”

The kit-bag mouth had opened, its owner, now alone on the white canvassed staging, falling into the attitude that seemed as natural to him as breathing, the right arm resting loosely across the arch of the ribs, the left sparring easily at its audience and ready for anything. The ex-heavyweight champion of the world had no head or face worth talking about, but one did not think of that when one looked at the lines of the figure—a living pedestal for the mouth above. Finn could only see that mouth. It engulfed all else.

And now the figure stood motionless against the ropes, the mouth had opened four square and had begun to speak, quick, low. The words rattled out as though the mouth had been a dice-box, tumbling over one another but with a syllabic clarity surprising. As volume and tempo grew, there was a metallic clang in them as if they had been weighted, the head began to move pivot-like upon the shoulder base as though it were working like a nodding Chinese mandarin in porcelain, the apish arms began to jerk themselves independently of the trunk, and as the sentences came hurtling through the megaphone of the throat, the legs began to move from the hips like those of a Jumping Jack as though the man were galvanised. The thin black line of reporters at their trestle table at the side hunched themselves to their task, but vainly. Still the terrible stream poured out through the square of the lips as though they came from a hose, and still the penmen staggered after, whilst the people listened as though their immortal souls were in the balance.

And now the high figure was lurching around the stage, the left foot forward, the right obediently trailing after, the piston arms shooting forward at his Invisible Antagonist, ever and anon the body setting itself for that one-time dreaded left hook which had so often, in Billy’s own words, “brought the bacon home,” and with it artists and poets, statesmen and muscular

Christianity to see him deliver it upon an adversary of flesh and blood.

The big man lurched from side to side as though possessed of the very devil he was supposed to be fighting, all the time a stream of words, torrential, which might have been blessings or blasphemies or both, pouring from his lips, whilst the poke bonnets behind and the blue and red uniform caps in front shrieked and hallelujahed in the retchings of the spirit. The voice megaphoned itself higher and higher—checked—and then the mouth had dived through the ropes, a hairy claw had reached downwards to the floor and had picked up a chair as though it had been a stick, brought it upwards, splintered it on the white canvas, lurched for another, and now the speaker, standing on both, the hands on either side of the great mouth, as though he would span the universal dome of the heaven above, was trumpeting his peroration of Goddom and Devildom in a voice rasping and changed as though the spirit inside were speaking through his throat. "Blood and Fire!" he screamed. "Who's for Heaven? Blood and Fire! and God damn the Devil! Blood and Fire!"

The figure had collapsed on to one of the chairs as though in a fit, the eyes that had almost vanished, now staring; the limbs relaxed; the mouth loose, slavering.

A moment's silence, and then the thunder of drum and tinkle of tambourine mingled with the shouts of the faithful and the groans of the unfaithful.

"Who's for heaven? Blood and Fire!"

It was the high thin voice of the General once more dominating from the platform and compelling silence.

"Who's for heaven?"

The place was very still. Even the groaning had ceased.

"Who's for heaven?"

There fell again that trembling in the air.

A figure broke itself frailly from one of the side-aisles. It swayed brokenly in the silence as it made its way towards the long bare form that ran from wall to wall. As it came into the lighted circle, Finn saw the lights beat on the face of a young girl, in it something of wonderment, of revelation. No flower of sin this, but a girl of the middle-classes, sheltered and refined, the grey eyes slightly opening under the white sailor hat that slanted a little backwards on the finely compact head.

As she sank by the form, it was as though something had passed through the surcharged atmosphere, discharging its electricity. And now from every side the people like drunken men lurched up the aisles to cast themselves upon the hard boards, sinking their heads between their hands, their shoulders moving convulsively, as though they too were possessed. The great building was emotional with the waves that billowed through it—wave on wave—submerging opposition. Finn felt desire uncontrollable, despite his unbelief, to fling himself down there with the rest, throwing himself upon the lethal bosom of faith, to be carried on the roll of drum and the shouting of the multitude into something, he knew not what.

“Mr. Pickles!”

A voice like a silver trumpet found its way through the frenzy of the place, which hushed itself into silent listening.

“Mr. Pickles!”

And now Finn could see the very tall young man, inclined to corpulency, where he bulked a little to the right and in front of him, standing under the arc-glare addressing the man with the mouth, who had come to himself and was once more alone on the platform. There was something exceeding courteous about this tall young man in the tight-fitting frock-coat with the velvet collar, a corner of laced cambric showing from the pocket. As he moved his head a trifle away, Finn caught the sheer fine-formed nose, with something pinched and thoroughbred about the nostrils, the dark eye, prominent, voluptuous, with heavy drooping eyelid, set squarely in the head, the high smooth forehead with the curling brown-black hair that, as he moved, took a tone of red. The mouth was small, almost tiny, the Cupid’s bow of the lips thick and red. Despite the olive smoothness of his face, there was something about this man that might have been Assyrian.

“Mr. Pickles!”

The tone was curiously considerate, but the face of the man in the ropes showed hostile as it searched for the voice. Already there was a wavering at the penitent form, and one or two figures slunk shamefacedly back across the lighted circle. The tremblement had passed.

And now Pickles had found him.

“Name!” the big mouth megaphoned. It was a trick which in one form or another had never failed a man who in the ring

had been a master of intimidation and who now used it for the salvation of souls.

"I should say Lucifer, Son of the Morning, were it not blasphemous," replied the tall man quietly. "But I am only his servant. My father called me Paris Asthar," he continued.

Every eye was staring, avid, at the young aristocrat who was the sensation of the daily paper, the scandal of London, and the darling of its gods. Paris Asthar, son of old Asthar, eccentric and Irishman. That was something worth looking at anyhow. The penitent form was forgotten.

"Well?" The mouth was uncompromising.

"Quite, thank you." Somebody giggled. But the face of the man with the orchid was immovable.

"I mean wot-cher-want?" came nasally.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I must have misunderstood you."

"And I say—wot-cher-want?" and then, after a moment, the big mouth opening, sardonic. . . . "Lucifer."

Paris Asthar bowed. "You do me too much honour," he said.

Something stirred a chord of memory in the listening boy. Then he remembered. Father LeStrange had said the same to his Aunt Bella. But this man was not Father LeStrange. Yet there was something. . . .

But the man with the orchid was speaking.

"It is because you so obviously misunderstand the nature and mission of the poor Devil that I venture to put in a word for him to-night. In the first place, you speak of his Majesty, Mr. Pickles, as though he were the only devil in the world—but this world, like other worlds, is full of devils, some of them devilishly improper and impossible, who play the very deuce with your existence as with mine, but some of them perfectly proper and very possible. . . ."

Finn noticed that the penitent form was emptying, some of those still at the form twisting half round to listen to the man who was speaking. As his eye ran along the crimson of the seats, he caught sight of a man who, sitting a few places on the other side of his father, with his curiously bright grey eye and a beard in which the fine snow had sifted itself through the hairs, might have been his father's elder brother, but a brother of a superior sort. He was rapidly making shorthand notes in a lined book bound with leather and had been doing



so all the evening. Every now and then he would look up at the platform with that expanding of the eye which had first caught Finn's attention.

There was something about the man, something friendly and natural, that made the boy's heart go out to him in the unreasoning way that it had. For a moment he wished that that had been his father . . . and then his conscience smote him. He loved his father in a pitying sort of way.

"That," said Father Lestrangle, replying to the boy's question, "that is Lanthorn, editor of the review that bears his name. He is a seer of visions and a dreamer of dreams. He is known as the prince of journalists, although Paris Asthar—who christens everybody—has christened him the Prince of Darkness because of his spiritualistic experiments.

So that was Lanthorn, the spiritualist, the man who had interviewed the uninterviewable, including the Russian Czar, whom he was said to have converted. And there was something else about him—Finn blushed in the way that he had as there came to him the misty memory of a dreadful case in which Lanthorn, "seeking copy" his enemies said, had procured evidence of the traffic in children and had served six months for a technical assault upon Mrs. Grundy, editing "The Lanthorn" from his cell.

". . . in fact I have no doubt, Mr. Pickles, if you will permit me to say so without offence, that I am a better Christian than you, showing as I do that charity which is the very foundation of Christianity even to the Master of Evil himself. *Advocatus Diaboli—Advocatus Dei*. It is so easy to be charitable to the really good. . . ."

It was the voice of Paris Asthar coming through the diminutive mouth as through a tiny silver trumpet. The big man inside the ropes, now gripping them in his big sinewy hands, had a look as though he were behind bars.

"Another little misapprehension, which indeed is shared by the members of the seventy-three sects which compose that branch of the Church to which you belong. . . ."

"I belong to the Church of Christ—to the universal church of Christ throughout the world. I am a member of all Christian churches!" The voice came strident from the high platform, angry, seeking assurance.

"Including the Church of Rome?" inserted Asthar with that

suavity of manner which seemed to irritate the big man into rawness.

"That is the Scarlet Woman," replied Pickles.

"Then you are not a member of *all* the Christian churches," went on Asthar, unmoved. "But as I was saying before this little digression, another of your misapprehensions is that Lucifer uses evil because he likes it from—er—what shall we say?—sheer devilry."

"He is the Father of Evil!" said the big man, dogmatic.

"Then who is the Father of good?"

"God!" said the big man with angry solemnity.

"And the Father of all things—living and dead?"

"God!"

"Then God is the father of your Devil."

"Blasphemy!" said the big man in a voice like Caiaphas.

"Not blasphemy, but logic, and all logic is blasphemous because it annihilates all distinction. There is no good or evil. These are only terms." A man back in the audience laughed, and checked himself.

Finn could see the sweat beads standing on the big man's forehead like frosted dew where he moved his face under the arcs. He was very pale and he drew his breath like a man who had been running. Finn felt quite sorry for him, but forgot his sorrow in his admiration for that breadth of shoulder.

"To return to our misapprehensions. Lucifer was once angel—your bible tells you that as I think it tells you everything in the world worth knowing . . . if you only know how to read it," he added after a moment . . . "but the God he served was a God of power—your bible tells you that also—and Lucifer lusted, as he had the right to lust, for the only thing in the universe worth having—for Power. But power, like all other things, can only be purchased at a price—perhaps God himself paid his price in the eternities to Another before him—and the price was the sacrifice of good—that is, of godship."

"Blasphemy! blasphemy!" came the thin voice of the General like that of an angry old woman from under the platform at the side, where he seemed to be holding a watching brief on behalf of the Almighty. It sounded ridiculous in the stillness of the place.

"And when he fell, flung by a greater power than his own,

fell to earth, he found the god of this world—yes, for this world has its own gods and devils—using the weapon of his master—the God of the universe—good.” So far the speaker had been speaking with a sort of light earnestness of his own; now, his face broke into the smile that had seduced London—” “. . . and so there was only evil left for the poor devil. When the day comes that he has conquered good with evil, he will become good.” He was serious again.

“The battle between good and evil is not eternal—even you presuppose its ceasing at Doomsday—the battle is not for principle but for power. It is the unceasing battle of the eternity of our little world as it is the battle of the Universe itself, with the gods of good and evil fighting on either side—fighting inside on the hearthstone of each heart as on those other outer battlefields of gun and armour. Even now, here, the fight is going on—just as outside in the shadows darkening over Europe, out of which comes the glitter of weapon and the tump of the anvil of war, preparation is being made for that Armageddon of our time which will come before two decades have passed. King and statesman—bishop and scientist—workman and little bourgeois—they are all protagonists for the gods standing behind, and when the armies of the world will have gripped in the physical deathlock of the war to come, above them, the angels of light and darkness, of what we call good and evil, will be battling with the weapons of the spirit.”

“Time up!” said the big man, looking on his antagonist in pale malignity. “Sit down!”

The man to whom he spoke sat down with an inclination of the fine head—only now the face was smiling steadfastly at the man within the ropes, whose face to Finn seemed contracted as though he were in pain. The big mouth opened once or twice spasmodically and then it had broken into the first line of the Glory Song: “Oh that will be, Glory for me. . . .”

A woman at the back joined in piercingly and then stopped, appalled at her own voice in the unbroken silence . . . and still the man with the orchid stared upwards, smiling.

“All together!” said the big man, his voice straining.

Here and there a voice broke in, and stopped. There was something of strangulation in the atmosphere. And still the man in the frock-coat smiled.

The man up there on the platform and the man down there



in the hall seemed to be grappling, although the man on the platform did not look at the other. His eyes searched the building, as though seeking help. His mouth opened as though he were trying to speak.

But the spirit of chaos seemed to have entered the place.

"Shut up Pickles!" came from a man a few paces from Finn.

"Fairplay for the gent!" from an unshaven Eastender of protruding jowl who sat in front nursing a cold pipe in the hollow of his right fist as he crossed one knee more comfortably over the other to listen.

"*Will* you let me speak. . . ." It seemed that the man on the platform had been trying to make himself heard for some time, although nobody had noticed him in the tumult which had been rising again.

"I *will* speak," said Pickles, to whom a meeting of this sort was a new experience.

But still Paris Asthar smiled.

"You have not answered me yet," he said.

"Time's up!" bellowed Pickles, looking over Asthar's head. He still searched the building with that straining look.

"I am still waiting for your answer," came from Asthar.

"Oh, you——" Pickles paused for a moment, then plunged—"you can shut your face!" He licked his lips as though he had got something off his mind.

"Order! order!" came from the middle of the hall.

"There is no time to take each one separately. I'll take the gentleman on my left who I think has been trying to catch my eyes for some time and then"—the eyes set viciously—"knock you out one by one!"

"Why don't you answer the gent?"

"He's afride. Ca-ward!"

"Don't answer. Let's have the Glory Song!"

"Go on Pickles—where's your bloody left?"

"Shut up! . . ."

"Oh if I'd only got you ahtside. . . ."

And then, shrill: "Oh that will be, Glo-o-o-ry. . . ."

But the cries increased in volume as the tall evangelist stood there like a baited bull, the great mouth opening itself in bel-lowings that went unheard under the rising din. One could only see the maw opening and shutting and the red of the

gums as the white light struck on them from above. His arms were moving—his face distorted.

Voices were crossing one another. Taunts were hurling over the floor of the tabernacle. The poke bonnets at the back showed a tendency to lift themselves. And now the conductor had given the signal and the massed bands added to the turmoil, the eyes of the bandsmen straining over their instruments.

Two men were fighting at the back of the hall; there was a rush against the doors which yielded a little, held and then gave way . . . and then the mob had been vomited forth into the night, filling the spaces under the pale stars with curses and strange cries, as though devils had been loosed.

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## V

### A DAY IN THE LIFE OF PARIS ASTHAR

OUT of the velvety blackness came the ticking of a clock that sentinelled the time with hurried footsteps. From where the blackness seemed to heap itself a little together in the corner, there came a regular pulsation. The pregnant air seemed to hold within it something living. A single ray of gold stole from the side of what might have been a thickly curtained window.

A triple chime shivered through the room like the breaking of glass, a shadow crossed the line of the noiselessly opened door, there was a click, and the room was filled with a golden smother that came from the ledge under the high ceiling. It merged the black and gold of the walls, pannelled in oak to the half of their height, with the deep blue of the thick carpet and of the curtains, brushed the counterpane of quilted silk where the line of fine lawn ran across it, and showed under the swell of the canopy of blue that hung above, the dark hair which in that light was touched with red and with it the long lashes and olive cheeks of Paris Asthar.

The head moved.

"Is that you, Togo?" came a sleepy voice.

The little figure, its head a trifle on one side, moved over to the bed with quick stilted strides as though it were walking on pins.

"What time is it, Togo?" The big man yawned and stretched his arms above his head, the breast of his silken pajamas parting to show the great hairless body beneath. He looked at it with a certain complacency and passed a smooth white hand inside the fold to comfortably stroke himself. With his other hand, he smoothed the down of an Angora cat which had sprung like a grey-blue ghost upon the silk of the counterpane, for Paris Asthar had a passion for cats, aristo-

cratic brutes, beautifully behaved and dainty in form and taste, which had the run of the place.

"Three o'clock, sah."

"We must give up these late hours, Togo. Three o'clock last night and dawn the morning before." Complacent, he continued to stroke himself as the little man, obediently acquiescent, inclined his head and went out of the room.

The scent of mocha came through the door as it opened to show the little oriental standing there, in his hand a deep-rimmed shining salver upon which a miniature coffee pot of burnished silver stood over the flame of evanescent blue which floated upwards, by its side a tiny cup and saucer. He laid the salver upon a little lacquer table at the side of the bed and went to the first of the three high windows, half drawing the one-piece curtain that ran squarely across. He switched off some of the lights.

And so, as he went from window to window and extinguished the last light, the room was filled with the afternoon sun.

He returned to his master, crooking a paw like a piece of gnarled oak around the handle of the coffee pot and poured out a cup of the shining black liquid which, having sipped, Asthar declared to the smiling Togo that "he now felt himself able to face the horridness of reality."

After his bath, Paris Asthar in a leopard kimono of black and yellow that gave to him something of the great cat itself, nibbled (it was surprising how everything turned to fat in Paris) some *brioche*s and looked at a broiled kidney. The peaches on the table he did not touch.

As he rose, he caught sight of himself in the full-length oval mirror before him and winced. But he persuaded himself that the bulge above the loosely drooping knot of the silken waist-robe was kimono, not obesity. He contracted himself a little.

"Been having any more letters from fine ladies, Togo?" he asked the grinning oriental. The ugly little Japanese seemed to have strange fascination for Paris's lady friends.

"No, sah," piped Togo. "At least, not since the last from Mrs. Swathe, sah. She thinks I'm a Buddhist, sah." Togo grinned delightedly.

"Beelzebub," said Paris solemnly, taking on his knee the big black cat with the absinthe coloured eyes which had been basking in the sunlight under the window, "listen. Beware of

Togo's fine ladies, who take you on their knees and tell you that you are beautiful. Especially beware when they do it in the name of religion, for which even your distinguished prototype had a weakness. Don't let them seduce you, my beauty."

The slant eyes of the brute on his knee seemed to stare at him with understanding. It rolled over on its back and struck at him lazily in covert, green-eyed delight. Togo listened as he cleared away.

Having placed his master in a pair of exceedingly well-cut grey-striped trousers, falling over a pair of patents upon which M. de Guiche of varnish fame had done his best, held for him a frock-coat in which he seemed to have been poured, and handed to him a hat of glossiness inconceivable, Togo finished his work by producing apparently from the small of his back an ivory-topped malacca and a pair of gloves of grey *suède*. Thus, in his own words, "the day having been aired," you can see Paris Asthar's black satin tie that wound itself twice around the smoothness of the collar, and great emerald, strolling, nonchalant, past the House of Commons, through the St. James and Green parks to Hyde Park Corner, where their owner, who seemed to unfold in the afternoon sun like a flower in water, cast at the Row the eye indifferent. As it turned away, it caught the double-breasted reefer and curling beard of a man who was passing and who seemed to be no more aware that it was a scorching July day than if he had been a salamander.

The man at whom he was looking, the man with the honest doggy eyes of brown overshadowed by the heavy frontal bones of the forehead and who gave the onlooker a general impression of shagginess, was Professor Dust, prince of science and the authority on trematodes, that parasitic worm which lives in the intestines of animals, and of which a familiar specimen is the human tapeworm. The professor was one of the most distinguished of living biologists and had not only written a big book upon trematodes found in the loggerhead turtle but, frankly, regarded the universe as turning upon them. Almost the only orthodox survivor of the Darwinian theory in its original purity, to which he clung as to a biological bible, he regarded Weismann and Archdall Reid as terrible heretics.

"Hello Professor!" cried Asthar. "Just the man I wanted to see. That talk about trem-trema-trematodes" (he had got it at last) "into which you inveigled me the other day inter-

ested me amazingly. Let's hear some more about your wriggly worms." He hooked the Professor by the arm and marched him down Piccadilly.

". . . yes," that gentleman said with a certain eager shyness. "Trematodes, my dear Asthar. . . ."

"Excuse me," his companion broke off quickly, unhooking, and bowing profoundly to a young girl who was passing in a victoria drawn by a pair of high-stepping blacks. "My half-sister," he said.

The Professor, already mazed in his trematodes, had a vague impression in the afternoon sunlight of a pair of hazel eyes; a cloud of tawny hair cut to the neck; a slender girlish figure—and it was gone.

". . . as I was saying, my dear Asthar . . . what you have always to bear in mind regarding trematodes. . . ."

The voice gathered weight and volume as they passed along, the eyes lighting under the working of the overhanging brows, the passers by catching" . . . *pachypsolus undulatus*, my dear Sir;" with the recurrent refrain: "*caretta, caretta*. . . ." and then ". . . of vital import to the whole future of biological investigation—I might say, to the race itself. If you would only give that splendid brain of yours to the study of trematodes instead of to dying religions . . . to ghosts . . . ghosts. . . ." The Professor laughed indignantly. He gesticulated with the free arm, finally breaking the other out and using that also in his indignant accentuation

Asthar stopped him for a moment to feel for a shilling, which he gave to one of those white-faced women who live by shaming the civilisation that is Piccadilly's. "Excuse me, Professor," he said . . . "and as you were saying. . . ."

The torrential "*caretta, caretta*" continued, the shaggy arm waved the length of Piccadilly, Asthar's figure gracefully bulking over his squat friend, until, as they came to the turning beyond Devonshire House, the big man graciously disengaged himself from the scientist and floated up the steps of a building over the fanlight of which stood: "Esoteric Club." Two young men were looking at him from one of the side windows. Asthar knew it.

As he came to the door, he stopped suddenly. And it was curious to see how his expression changed.

A very young girl was standing there on the squares of black



and white marble which formed the floor of the hall, her left hand resting lightly upon the turn of the balustrade, looking slenderly upwards towards where the staircase turned past the stained glass window that threw its gold and blue upon the marble. The sunlight streamed down upon the aureole of tawn, cut to the base of the young firm neck where it came up clean from the hollow of the dress of Irish green, looking as though it had been strewn with gold-dust. The rather short, strong nose, in profile, the eyes placed fair under the delicate brows, the strong lines of the red lips where they parted over the thinner line of ivory—all looked upwards expectant. The face, with something hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed, might have been that of the first woman.

The head turned quickly, the lips closing, as though the girl had felt something. The languorous figure tautened. The hazel eyes with the dark shadows in them smiled on the big man.

"The annunciation," he said almost tenderly, as he went forward and kissed his half-sister on the forehead which she bent to him.

Relieved of his hat, cane and gloves by the discreetly whiskered attendant in the uniform of solemn black, Asthar was crossing the hall with his half-sister, when a figure, appearing from a room at the side, half limped half twisted itself across the marble chessboard, now checkered by the afternoon sun, and then, turning at his "Hullo, Stella!" sidled up to him. As he did so, Deirdre Asthar, with an impulsive gesture, so faint as almost to be imperceptible, suddenly broke from him and disappeared.

She was a girl of the early twenties, her hair of burnished copper, coiled low on the neck of soft-fairness, catching the sun-rays through the open door. The graceful whip-like body, graceful for all its high unevenness of shoulder, twisted itself curiously as it progressed, with something of a limp that was not a limp. The grey eyes with the tiny black irises that reached upwards at the big man, had something eager, staring. In the slightly vulpine nose with the spreading nostrils set over the rather full carmine of the lips, there was something hungry, biting.

"Hullo, Paris!" she said, indifferently eager—but she looked towards the door through which Deirdre had disappeared. The

big man looked, too, with a little vertical line of puzzlement showing itself momentarily over the base of the straight nose, and then, his serenity restored, he slipped a hand in comradely fashion through the tiny arm of rounded pink that gleamed softly through the white silk and passed with her into the room lying beyond the curtained door. There was something indefinably feminine about it. The place had colour and relaxation and it was cool and dark after the hot sun of the street.

Figures came out of the shadows to greet Asthar, who was evidently a favourite. There were both men and women, for the Esoteric, as everybody knows, is bi-sexual—or, as Paris Asthar expressed it, “a-sexual.” The young men who showed themselves had something feminine in them, whilst the women, most of them ultra-fashionably dressed, though not masculine, could not be called feminine. There was something languidly desperate, something eroding, about their tired eyes, their painted lips, and their hollow slender bodies. In the Esoteric, man and woman blended so nearly that they might have been a third sex. A neutral sex. “Civilisation, thank God! is developing the neuter gender,” said Asthar.

And there, Asthar, Comrade Magnificent, his arm still resting within that of Stella Fay, lolled upon a sofa over which hung the heavily perfumed women who puffed at the scented cigarettes which they held between thumb and first finger, always excepting the copper-haired girl who held hers man-fashion, sucking the smoke in deeply, holding it a moment, and then expelling it in two thin streams from those hungry nostrils. The young men, with a tendency to long hair and hour-glass waists, hung on each word as it came from the man they called “The Master,” who through it all seemed to be nursing to himself a secret—something to be held deep and gloated over—a secret that showed itself in the large prominent eye, in the assured pose of the body, in the sleek contemplation of the patent leathers. It was curious to note how he seemed to swell—to take new vigour as he talked and they listened.

And so, having refreshed himself, bowing farewell with that bulky graciousness which was already famous, Paris Asthar went out into the golden sunlight, continuing his stroll, superbly, inclining like a prince to his intimates, showing to his subordinates a condescension that had no offence but rather



something of benignity, but always with that secret assurance that had in it something of complacency. There was an utter forbearance about Paris Asthar that might have been democracy, but might have been merely slothfulness or even superiority. For the verminous in the gutters of Piccadilly he reserved a special charm of manner. The white, rather plump hand, was always finding its way to the waistcoat of grey *suède* for the inevitable shilling. To the flower-girl outside the Berkeley, his pleasant "Hullo, Mary!" might have been the "Hullo, Stella!" of the hour before. With the impostor of greasy smartness whose medals and brass plate bore witness to the shortness of memory of an ungrateful country, he exchanged a look which might have been the compounding of a felony, but which ended in the shilling. The golden ferrule of his malacca he gently inserted in the stomach of the baby of the peripatetic woman on the Regent Street curve, making his weekly assertion to its tentative progenitor that he "hated babies" and giving her the invariable shilling to prove it, the lady in question, of the draggled respectability of her kind, yielding however good current exchange in a "Gawd bless yer, Sir," not wholly ungenuine.

And so across the street to the Continental, all eyes following the bulky figure as well known to London as the Mercury in the Circus. For each waiter he had his own special greeting—throwing a word of Italian at one, something in French at another, and sending a round-faced German into gelatinous delight by his "Guten Abend, Hans!" The manager, abasing himself before his most distinguished customer, conducted him personally to his own seat in his own particular corner.

With Asthar, enthroned in solitary majesty, there was again that secret complacency. It was with him as he sat there, the absinthe in his glass reflecting itself greenly on the swarth of his face. It was with him that evening as he sat in the stalls at Her Majesty's, gazing out over the crowd, and it was with him as he walked home across the garland of the Circus; with him, as the painted girls stared from under their leaded brows at his great figure; and with him as he hung over the bridge at Westminster watching the stars that blotched themselves in the darkling waters.

He looked down past the House of Commons, across the jewelled tides, whilst behind him the hot night-winds blew the

dust-eddies about his polished boots. Towering above his head, Big Ben sentinelled London with his moon face. The monstrous façades of the Embankment glittered cold over the sleeping forms upon the iron seats beneath. From a public-house across the water there came the strum of a banjo. The great white night lay about him, cradling the city.

But through it all his secret—the secret of his own invincibility and immortality. Paris Asthar—Immortal.

## VI

### THE POWERS OF DARKNESS

THE tiny Japanese images that stared at little Togo in Paris Asthar's drawing room at "The Cloisters" seemed as much of the place as the little man himself and much more living than Beelzebub who, perched sphinx-like upon the edge of the ebony Erard, was as though he had been carved out of the wood in which the yellow eye-slants reflected themselves. The little man, after fractionally adjusting a chair or a vase, his head a little on one side like one of the ivory images that grinned approval about him, would stand back to survey his work, motionless as the cat behind. The tiny figure in the suit of sober black would then spring into life and with deft silent movements would adjust an ornament, falling again into an image of yellow ivory. Perhaps Beelzebub knew of what he was thinking.

No women servants were employed at "The Cloisters," nor, with the exception of Togo, or on those special occasions when a waiter or two were imported, did the guest ever lay eyes upon a servant. Somewhere, however, in the depths of the old house under the shadow of Westminster, a highly cultivated troglodyte chef existed, together with a man of all work and a small boy.

Nobody knew much about the house. Rumour had it that it was the rendezvous of very curious people indeed. Once, an excited pressman had written up a cock and bull story about "nightly orgies," Paris Asthar responding by an exceedingly courteous invitation to the editor and staff of the paper to come to one of "the orgies" at any time they liked, which made all London laugh. For, had he not said that, as the most misunderstood man in London, if he once started being offended he would have to spend the rest of his life in actions for libel. "And I don't need the money." He didn't. He was one of the wealthiest young men in London.

A female cook, in the days before femininity had been banned, a lady with whom he had had a slight difference of opinion as to omelettes, had, some years before, upon her scientific removal to the front steps with her box by Togo, who, in an encyclopædic mind, found room for a knowledge of jiu-jitsu, imparted to a sceptical policeman but open-minded audience a story of a secret chapel. "And," she had sniffed into her apron, as she adjusted her bonnet, "sich goings on. I see'd it once. A lot of twirlygigs all over the ceiling and a haltar wiv stone monkeys on it and hidols—naked hidols—one of 'em, a shameless 'ussy, 'ad 'er tongue out and," losing all restraint in the memory of her wrongs, "not even a shift to 'er back. I've seen wot I've seen and I know wot I know."

But there, outraged womanhood had let itself go, as a stray news hound, the scent strong in his nostrils, who had tracked the good lady to her lodgings in the Vauxhall Bridge Road, quickly discovered. Whatever she might have seen, she knew nothing. And although he did get a fiver for a highly imaginative article upon "The Black Mass in England," in the "Nighthawk," and referred obliquely to Paris Asthar, who through his objection to taking libel actions was considered fair game by all the gutter press, nobody believed him. Who could believe "The Nighthawk"—"a disgusting penn'orth?" Of course, everybody read it, but that was another matter.

A house like "The Cloisters" was bound to encourage the inflammatory imagination. There it stood at the end of a cul-de-sac, its door of purple glass, behind the scroll of iron-work that covered it, throwing queer lights on the snowy steps, which stood starkly against its mourning façade, its high black windows shining blankly to any light that might find its way over the high houses into the pit beneath. And when you got inside, which was not easy in a place where Togo was watchdog, there was that indefinable heaviness of the air and the high panelling of dark oak under the low ceilings.

And here was Paris himself, waiting in the gloom of his ground-floor drawingroom to receive his guests, in his frock-coat, high collar, and four-in-hand satin tie. The last he preened in the mirror of polished steel standing over the high fireplace as though he were preening his soul, and, as he did so, thought satisfying things.

There was a knock at the front door. Asthar slewed slowly

round as he composed his face. Togo, his legs moving like drumsticks, toddled to open it, disclosing Professor Dust in his invariable reefer jacket, and looking into the depths of an enormously impossible silk hat as he scratched his shaggy head with one splay paw that came out from the fore-shortened sleeve of his jacket out of which jutted a false cuff.

Having reluctantly surrendered the hat which, in his heart of hearts, the Professor, otherwise indifferent in matters of dress, regarded with secret pride, and having patted his dickey into place over the flannel shirt which had protruded a trifle between vest and front, the bearded face, the eyebrows bushing themselves apprehensively over the kindly eyes—for the Professor was, in social matters, a nervous subject—came forward at a trot into the room and Paris Asthar found his smooth plump hand engulfed by the hairy paw of the man he called “my friend the enemy.”

But Professor Dust was almost swept on one side by the onrush of the big, well-dressed man with the upturned nose and beady eyes which gave something porcine to the smooth, clean-shaven face, who put his diminutive hand into that of Asthar, who had brought these two scientific giants together because they hated the sight of each other. It seemed there had been a difference of opinion as to the exact degree of inspiration attaching to certain passages of Darwin. Sir Lancaster Hogge had heterodox ideas upon environment, whereas Professor Dust was orthodox to the last hair of his woolly pate.

“What the devil am I here for?” squeaked the famous biologist in a voice that sounded strange from that great cask of a body. “That’s what I’ve been asking myself ever since I left the Cromwell Road. That’s what I ask.” He sneered high, a curious half titter, half neigh.

He really detested being there, but Asthar was to him as the candle to the moth. The smile on a face of apparent good humour was only to keep up appearances, and Asthar knew it.

“I’ll tell you, my dear Hogge. You’re here partly because I asked you, partly because you’re a fashionable scientist, and partly because you’re the most pugnacious old bore that ever held to the Darwinian theory. . . . Oh, let me introduce you. Miss Stella Fay—Professor Dust I think you know.” His mouth, sardonic, twisted itself a little to one side.

He turned to the girl with the hair of burnished copper, who had just come in. "Sir Lancaster Hogge," he said, completing the introduction. . . . "Why, God bless my soul! if it isn't Ali Baba." He broke away to greet a sinuous Indian, who, exceedingly correct, presented a well-pomaded moustache and two grinning rows of white teeth, which seemed to fill the dark face. His host thought he looked damnable, but he smiled to him almost affectionately.

Ali Hassan, or Ali Baba, as Asthar called him, was an interesting example of the Europeanised Indian. Originally Mohammedan, he had come to have a profound contempt, not only for the hereditary enemy, the Hindu, but for his motherland, and was now engaged in delivering a series of lectures in the best Oxford manner, which made satisfying demonstration of the helplessness of the Indian and the virtue of leading strings.

The room was filling with people, some of them the men and women of the Esoteric. Togo, in some way of his own, had managed to pass into the room a silver tea kettle and some Dresden cups and saucers, whilst every chair and projection had its plate of bread and butter or cake or comfits. Everybody was talking, smoking, and eating. Professor Dust, one little curved leg tucked comfortably away under the knee of the other, was trying to do all three at once, even using a spare hand to scratch his scalp as well, looking like some well-trained animal from where he sat in the corner of a divan—all this to the disgust of Sir Lancaster, who, for all his good-humour, did not trouble to conceal his outraged feelings. But the thing that really ate into him and was at the root of all his disgust was that difference of opinion about environment that poisoned the satisfactions of his scientific life. Dust was always crossing him.

Asthar lolled upon the long ebony seat before the grand, where he had just finished playing a Chopin nocturne to a scarce breathing audience which had stopped its chatter to listen, for he was a very great amateur. Out of the silence, there came the high snort of Professor Hogge, who sometimes had lapses as to time and place.

"They tell me you've been defending the devil, Asthar, at one of those Tabernacle meetings. Good God! what will you do next?"



"I thought you didn't believe in one or the other," said Asthar.

"And I don't. *You* don't, if it comes to that. Nobody does. It's a pose. That's what it is." He snorted in not altogether good-humoured offence. Incidentally, he had been trying for the past five years to quarrel with Paris Asthar but could never manage it. Nobody could.

"Well, what do you believe in, Sir Lancaster?" asked Stella Fay.

"I believe in anything that can be demonstrated. I believe in what I feel or see or hear. I believe in my biology. I believe in mathematics. *They* can be demonstrated."

The girl shrugged one high shoulder disdainfully and sucked deeply at her cigarette as she thought to herself what nonsense it all was, without exactly knowing why. Not that she wanted to know. She was too irritated for that, and irritation always sensitized her intuitions whilst dulling her intellectual processes.

"Anyhow what is 'belief?' Nobody can demonstrate 'belief.'" The speaker was a young-old man, whose enormous head, wrinkled on scalp and face, and weak curly legs, gave him something of those things preserved in spirits. He had wafted over to them as he spoke and now wafted away again.

"Perhaps I can't. But neither you nor Asthar can demonstrate the gods and devils in which you pretend to believe." The Professor was becoming steadily more irritable. "What I can demonstrate are my facts."

"Will you die for your facts?" asked the girl with the copper hair. "People before now have died for gods and devils." There was nothing in the words, but she conveyed offence inexpressible.

"Belief," said Ali Baba in a highly cultured accent and showing his rows of grinning ivories—"belief is a mattah of opinion. I quite agree with Sir Lancaster." He tried to look as though, for all his lightness, he had thought it all carefully out. He was, as a matter of fact, thinking of nothing.

That eminent scientist looked at the smiling Indian with intense dislike, the little nose snubbing itself a trifle.

"What I *can* demonstrate is that men have come from monkeys," he said, looking hard at the unconscious Indian.



"Can you?" asked Asthar. "Are you sure that monkeys did not come from men?"

"Very good, very good. Ha-ha!" grinned Ali.

"I don't see how anyone who had not had a scientific training could doubt it," inserted Stella with an offensiveness that was quite her own, slowly expelling a thin stream of smoke from her left nostril.

The Professor laughed in high irritation. "Proof," he said. "Proof."

"Proof. Who wants proof? What do you think the female of the species has her intuitions for?"

"Intuitions!" snorted the Professor contemptuously. "'Intuitions!' We can leave those to 'the female of the species.'" Professor Hogge was an apostle of the Male Principle and the girl *had* been very provoking.

"If it comes to that, the intuitive is at least no more unreliable than the unscientific, as the volte-faces of science during the last century prove." Paris was blandly informative.

"You'll tell me next that the poet is the best scientist," sneered Sir Lancaster.

"I don't need to. The century-old vision of the poet is the scientific fact of to-day. Have you ever heard of Shelley or Yeats or the first chapter of Genesis, Professor?"

"Perhaps you don't believe in the scientific method?" said the eminent scientist, in a voice that hinted at blasphemy.

"The result, which is fast becoming the object of the scientific method of which you speak, is the blurring of the intuitive, which, incidentally, is one reason why 'the female of the species' is necessary as a corrective to keep clean the windows of our souls. And, incidentally, every new discovery of science is the result of those antennæ of intuition which the scientist puts out into the ether to catch the breath of inspiration, as the fisherman casts his line into deep waters, and which are the stages of the intellectual process. In fact, there is no intellectual process." He looked round him with bland insolent delight at the effect of his paradox.

"What's all that got to do with your nonsense of monkeys coming from men?" asked Professor Dust, butting into the discussion to the extreme annoyance of Sir Lancaster, who frowned majestically. He looked, as he crouched in his corner, like a very intelligent but bewildered ape who, for the first

time in his life, had come across a nut too hard for him to crack.

"Where's your proof?" he continued, scratching his shaggy head with one of his great hands.

"Proof of what?" asked the girl.

"Proof that Asthar's theory is correct."

"Have you ever visited the Zoo, Professor?" asked Asthar from where he lolled. "Have you ever watched our poorer relations—a perfectly scientific definition, incidentally—making love or scratching themselves?" He said it again, maliciously: "scratching themselves?" Can you look into their faces and not see that they are only degenerate humans, intensely old and wise? Darwin's theory was all right, but he got it upside down. Evolution implies descent as well as ascent."

"Proof," said Sir Lancaster, monotonously. "Proof."

"Exactly," said the Oxford hybrid. "Exactly, Miss Fay. Proof." The dark-faced speaker said it vaguely. He was wondering in his heart whether to poison the Professor, to whom he had conceived the intense dislike of the slighted man, or to sacrifice the girl whose hair of shining copper and the whiteness of whose neck filled his dark head with fancies.

"You shouldn't talk about proof," said the girl looking at the Indian, cryptic and poisonous. She turned away. "Proof is only for scientific idiots. Whoever heard of a woman's intuitions being wrong—and whoever heard her prove them? Pshah!" She lapsed into contemptuous silence.

Sir Lancaster looked at the amazing girl, sighed angrily and titillated his little snub nose with a dainty piece of cambric which he took from his coat sleeve.

"When Asthar tells me he believes in the devil, I ask him to prove it," he said in a high atheistical voice. "When he tells me he believes in the soul—again, I ask him to prove it." His smiling eyes showed a trifle of brutality. "I cannot find either the one or the other. In my lecture which I delivered before the Rationalist Truth Society on 'Where does the Soul lie?' in which I have compared the heart and brain weights of monkeys and men—I declare that I have been unable to find a soul. The modern European finds he has no soul. Europe, thank God! has abolished the soul and with it the devil."

"How can it abolish what has never existed?" commented

Asthar absently . . . "but I am glad that you don't forget to thank God." He chuckled.

"That was only an atavistic slip."

"Man in religion is atavist," said his antagonist. "He slips eternally back into the eternal. Dogmatic science, like its bastard brother, dogmatic religion, is bankrupt, dying. But the gods are eternal." The others had closed in a trifle as the big man leant there on one elbow, an eye turned upwards, listening to the words that came in that curiously high voice from the silver trumpet of his lips.

"Good God!"

The exclamation, muttered, irrepressible, which followed Asthar's words, came from the corner of the divan, where Professor Dust, in growing amazement, had been listening.

"You'll excuse me. Felt it my duty not to keep quiet any longer." The shaggy man was very solemn. He hesitated a moment. . . .

"I hear a cultured Englishman. . . ."

"Irishman," said Asthar, laconic.

"Irishman, a gentleman whose intellectual keenness has made its name through Europe, talking of gods and devils. Gods and devils!" There was amazement in the voice as it rose a trifle from its depths. "Gods and devils!" The words came in puzzled solemnity. "Gods and devils—and we are living on the threshold of the twentieth century, when everybody knows that there *are* no gods and there *are* no devils. . . ."

"Who's 'everybody'?"

"Your correction is reasonable, my dear Asthar," said the scientist—"perhaps I should have said the people with properly ordered and trained minds, that is to say, scientifically trained. Science has abolished all this talk of gods and devils, as it has de-materialised ghosts, spooks, call 'em what you will." He went wide for a moment as a ship yawns in a seaway. "Nobody believes in such things to-day except. . . . except . . . " he stumbled a little. . . .

"Except Mr. Pickles, General Bliss, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Alfred Russel Wallace, Sir William Crookes, myself, and three-fourths of the world, civilised and uncivilised." The young aristocrat was exasperating.

"*We* don't believe in devils. We men of science. *We* say

there are none, and there aren't!" He was becoming more and more dogmatic in his earnestness. "There really aren't," he added, his eyes slightly staring.

"In other words, you replace the dogma of affirmation by the arch-dogma of negation, the scientist taking the place of the priest," inserted Asthar with smiling suavity.

Dust caught the smile, and lost himself—a very rare thing with him.

"People who believe in such things ought to be locked up—for their own sakes and others—in asylums!"

"Leaving a fourth of the race outside to watch the three-fourths inside?"

"When we are dealing with hysteria, the hysteria of gods and devils, we don't know where we are; but when we are dealing with the material, with *facts*, such as . . ." he hovered a moment, then swooped, triumphant, "such as trematodes, we know where we are."

"When I tell you that I have found a specimen of the *Pachypsolus undulatus* in the loggerhead turtle (*Caretta, caretta*) in the Mediterranean, entirely new and distinct from species found in the stomachs of the turtles captured in the Gulf of Mexico by Professor Bludgett in the year 1891; and when I tell you that exhaustive microscopic investigation has disclosed the existence of a collar-like cephalic ridge of the type that characterises the *Pronocephalidæ*, we know where we stand, for we are dealing with facts. When we compare this species with the *Rhyditodes cymbiformis*. . ." the Professor was now mounted and riding, but some hazy realisation of time and place finding its way to the dark recesses of his brain, he pulled up.

"Enough of that, however," he went on snorting a trifle like a blooded charger stopped in full career. "It is enough for us here and now to say that trematodes are facts, their knowledge of profound importance to the race . . . but ghosts. . ." he snorted contemptuously . . . "ghosts!" He was silent in his indignation.

Paris Asthar held courteous silence, waiting for his friend to continue, but, finding him speechless, he went on solemnly as though no interruption had taken place:

"To come from the trematode to the god, and gods are made of trematodes, the stuff is the same, it is only the form that is

different. Dogmatic science, as I have said, is dying, but the gods are eternal." He paused a moment.

"Listen," he said, and there was command in the voice, from which the lightness had fallen, "of all reigns, materialist science has had the shortest. Half a century." The voice hardened. The olive face, splendidly assured, shone in the half light. "Its temples, like the temples of those other dogmas, are being deserted, its high priests blaspheme their beliefs in the scientific associations themselves. It is the scientists themselves who have begun to fall into the crudest beliefs—it is the penalty that materialism pays to religion. And through it all, the mass of the people are untouched. Nominally the religion of the educated, like the dogmatic religions that preceded it, dogmatic science is passing. This is the age of the flux of faiths. Now, my gods," he paused a moment, sweeping upon his audience a dark eye in which the red lights seemed to be the reflection of the last rays of the sun that came over the rooftops outside, "dwell in temples not made with hands."

"Who are your gods?" asked Hogge, sarcastically.

"They are the eternal gods—the gods of power."

"How perfectly wonderful!" commented a woman who leaned her superfluous yard of back across a sofa standing out in the room and who had been listening to Asthar, adoringly. It was Togo's Mrs. Swathe.

"I don't believe in a God," announced Ali Baba irrelevantly. "I learned not to at Oxford." On his face was a superior grin. "There is no good and no evil. Those are only terms."

"Good boy, Ali Baba! Quite correct," said Asthar in delicate irony. "Good and evil are but parallel lines which, produced in space, meet, as every mathematician knows. The devil, who is the king of mathematicians as he is the king of science, also knows it. He can prove anything. He is a brainy devil. But you believe in magic, don't you, Ali?" He glanced at him maliciously.

"Oh, that's different," said Ali Hassan, hesitant. "You see, I've seen things out in India—things . . ." he stumbled, confused.

"Yes, he's seen things," said the man like a thing in a bottle, wafting forward out of the shadows, and then disappearing.

"How wonderful," said Mrs. Swathe, wriggling half a yard of back, ecstatic. This lady's faith was satisfactory—and



simple. It was that only good existed, and she got over such trifles as toothache and delirium tremens by saying that they were only good, disguised.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Asthar, smilingly.

"But what nonsense is this about science being bankrupt?" put in Professor Hogge, who had been vainly waiting to get in a word. "Do you think the world is going back to its beliefs in gods and devils?"

"It has never left them," retorted Asthar. "This age of materialism was but a phase—a mask. The centuries have seen many such phases. Some day, the gods will fling Europe into the crucible of war to burn off the last incrustations of to-day's materialism. People will say in that day of war that it has come because somebody wants Morocco, or because some nation has misbehaved itself, or because of nothing—but it will come to tear down the veils between the worlds, and for no other reason. On the fields of death, the veil wears thin. . . . For no other reason," he added after a moment from where he half reclined. "The gods use strong medicine."

Togo, who had been flitting from place to place, his head on one side, stopped in his clearing away. He was staring at the ceiling. Under the ochre of his face there spread a slow grin of scepticism that passed as it came. The silence was only broken by the high snuff of Sir Lancaster.

The shadows had fallen in the old room in which the figures, shadows themselves, had drawn in around the music bench, as around a throne. The man sitting there had lifted himself a little, the eye with the red lights in it shining whitely as it looked out through the windows, looking as though it saw something. In the turn of the head there was tremendous certainty.

He went on, and now the voice that came through the round of the lips was as the voice of another and delivering the message of another—of others:

"You think the gods are dead. The gods never die. They have never been more living—both the gods of power and those others, for the gods, like mortals, fight together. The principle of godship, as of mortality, is struggle. You think that this life of the concrete, if you will, of the conscious, this life of eating and drinking, buying and selling, lovemaking and death is *the* life. It is but the shadow of life—all these things are

but shadows of the things behind, pin-points in space for the realisation of the end of life—consciousness. The things that you say have no existence, the things of superstition or magic or faith, are reality—this earth-life, the unreal. Everything exists. There is no non-existence. Everything that can be thought, exists, for thought is the creator.

“The things seen in the ravings of a madman, the delirium tremens of the alcoholic—have these things no existence because *you* cannot see them? Has the ether no existence because it cannot be seen or weighed? Are there not sounds too great or too tiny to be heard—forces too fine to be measured? And do not the gods exist because *you* cannot see them or feel them?”

The only thing that showed itself in the now darkened room was the white of Ali Baba's eyes where they turned sideways to look at the glint of a sun ray upon the copper hair of Stella Fay. The shadow near the door might have been Togo.

“You who stand for the concreteness of fact, which, for like all, you must have your God, you have deified. Where have you been able to secure foothold for the negation of unbelief? How many of the millions of these islands do not believe? How many of Europe's white millions have no belief, secret or avowed? In this continent of the material, the gods still sway the secret thoughts of men. The financier, like the book-maker, consults the occultist in secret. The gods hold their sway in the kingdom of the gods, in the souls of men, in those chambers of flickering consciousness where men's actions are born. The European no longer worships his gods in churches, he worships them in a temple not made with hands—in his heart. He worships even whilst he blasphemes, believes whilst he denies. On the threshold of what men call death, the atheist falters.” His own voice trembled a little as he added—“For even the devils believe and tremble.”

“The gods are not dead in Europe because the milk-white gods of the Christian with their humility and repentance are passing—because in their place are coming the gods of assuredness, consciousness, power, and with them, the new religion, the Religion of Consciousness. The gods are not dead because we are now witnessing one of the age-long struggles for power—between the White Gods and what men call the Powers of Darkness, for we are seeing the rise of mysticism and the



gods of power at last coming into their own." He spoke in a sort of suppressed passion as though these things were being forced out of him.

"The gods do not lack devotees because the European is not building new temples. The gods are worshipped in men's hearts—they are fed, nay, they are created, by their thoughts. The gods are always worshipped, unconsciously or consciously. When the materialist speaks of the passing of the Idea of God, he means the passing of the church. He does not know that the deepest life of a nation is its subjective, not its objective—life—its unconscious, not its conscious, existence. The great mass are as unconscious as the toad in the rock. Like children, they have no past and no future. They live only in the present. It is only in moments of stress that the subjective rises above the threshold of consciousness, for translation into action, because it lies deepest. In moments of stress, national and individual, the belief in the unseen rises as surely as dead men rise out of deep waters.

"You say that the gods of other ages have died. They have not died. They have died but, like their symbols, to take new life under other names and forms, for with the rise of mysticism to-day, the power of the symbol returns—the swastika, the Cross, the Crescent, these things have always been and always will be, in one or another form. The goddess of the flesh that has been worshipped as Astarte and Anunit, Astharoth and Belit, Mylitta and Tanit and Venus, is not dead because she has changed her names and ritual. She is worshipped to-day in every European city; she dominates still in dark and awful forms the souls of men. To her the thoughts of millions pay their tribute daily. She and only she occupies a third of our waking and sleeping lives—in thought or act. The gods live on that on which they feed—on the prayers and thoughts of men. Without their food they die, for the gods are mortal. They are born again, for they are immortal.

A little sigh came out of the shadows. It might have been Stella Fay.

"The gods dead? Social Democracy, like Science, came out to destroy them, but to-day the Social Democracy of our time is pregnant with its gods—the gods of Democracy if you will, for Democracy has created its own gods in its own image—

that Democracy which has become a cult, the songs of which are hymns, its speeches—prayers. And opposed to it, power and a power-class, whose gods are my gods, the gods of power, whose litany is made to Caste, worshipped by unconscious followers who, like their antagonists, invoke their invisible leaders whom they have taken from the old gods of Hebrew and Christian that they have transformed. And now, even the democratic gods themselves are becoming gods of power as Democracy itself climbs to the seats of the mighty.

“Or, if you leave the continent of the concrete, you will find that the gods of power, driven by the gods of the Christian back to their ancestral fastnesses in Asia where uncounted millions have raised their hierarchies tier upon tier since time was young, are once more stealing back. In India, where the gods who walk the earth still live in the abodes of men. In Russia, whose millions give lip-service to the white gods, but who build their altars and make their sacrifices to those others. Or will you pass to Africa where the gods of the lower worlds form a hybrid phantasmagoria of godship, in which the black magic of the negro holds its sway against all the pulings of the missionary? Egypt, the time-old home of the occult, where all the teachings of Islam as of Christ have been unable to displace the invocation of the gods of power, that Egypt the pyramids of which were once the houses of initiation of the novitiate of the religion of power and magic, that Egypt which will once again be the nursery of the gods.

“Or will you turn to South America with its inextricable tangle of white and black gods, whose sons worship the bloody gods of Aztec even whilst they bow themselves under the Cross? For the gods of power are jealous gods. They stay where they were bred. Or to North America where a new religion rises every twenty-four hours and where one day a great world-religion will come out of the travail of the sects—a white religion—for America, with Ireland, will be the last stronghold of the white gods?”

The shadows had drawn closer in the room. A single ray of sunlight found its way into the corner behind the blue curtain.

“You speak of your science that is itself but an attempt for man to become god, for the finite to demonstrate the in-

finite. Look to the four hundred millions who in the dead centuries passed through that stage . . . and found nothing. China, a mirage of intellect, the apotheosis of the material, believing nothing, hoping nothing. There, amongst the yellow myriads, lie the ashes of the scientific method as of Science, and you would thrust mankind back on to what has only been a bridge from the instinct of the animal to the intuition—god-like intuition—of man. Man cannot always stand on his bridges.”

The little yellow figure that had slipped through the door and now stood behind the fold of the blue curtain, was listening. But it did not smile.

“Science.” The speaker laughed. “Humility. Self-sacrifice. Faith.” He laughed again, high, assured. “The gods of power are coming back to their own. Men shall learn power, not humility. Realisation, not sacrifice. Consciousness, not faith. The gods are waiting—they are here—they are listening. . . .”

He flung up his hand in passion uncontrollable. The last ray of sunlight disappeared from the window. They sat there in the silence.

## VII

### FINN WRESTLES WITH THE DEVIL

As Finn left the Tin Tabernacle on the night of the revival meeting which had ended so disastrously, a pamphlet was thrust into his hands by a greybearded man in a soft wide-awake. As he caught the eye of the man, he had that feeling which had come to him sometimes in the case of others, the feeling that he had seen the man somewhere before, quite recently, and then he remembered—it was the Lanthorn hat and the Lanthorn beard and eye, only that the eye was harder, less “fluid.” But even as he thought it, he caught sight of his father, a little bent, walking by his side—and it might have been his father. Many times had it come to him that some of the faces about him were as of one family, as though he had known these people at other times and in other places, that there was some hidden connection linking them together—and with him.

Yet these faces, so alike, often belonged to people who had nothing in common. A touch, and the face of the atheist became as the face of his father, a believer. A turn in the grey filament of the brain, and the thing that made this greybeard in the wideawake, propagandist for rationalism—he had read the title of the pamphlet: “*There is no Hell.*”—might have made him perhaps Lanthorn and sent him into the ranks of the spiritualists, or, with another turn, given him the awe and veneration that was his father’s.

It was all very confused and yet a confusion that only needed a touch to make it plain. It was like the dream which had been with him as far back as he could remember—the dream of a veiled figure which he followed down an endless twisting lane, the face of which he expected to see at the next turn, but which he never saw. At any moment the answer might come. It was just like that.

Why was it? Finn was at this time in a continual state

of interrogation. As his father said: "Why can't you behave yourself like a reasonable boy? What for do you always want to be asking the reason of everything? You're a young atheist, that's what you are." And then, having done his duty, Jemmy would go back to bury himself in Martyr and MacGlusky's Specials.

His sweet little grandmother, to whom he sometimes appealed on these difficulties as to the Higher Court of experience, for which youth, despite its bravado, has haunting respect, would tell him to "trust in the Lord and his Word." That it troubled the little woman at times was apparent, for Finn had heard her at the foot of the three steps that led from her bed, when one morning she had fallen down all three—she was getting a little feeble—pray, as, slightly stunned, she sat on the floor at the bottom: "Oh Lord! bring the dear boy to his loving Saviour and stop his questions. Amen." And so she sat in her nightgown of unbleached calico comfortably at the bottom, waiting to be picked up, and calling "Jemmy!" at intervals in her quavering treble.

But it was Finn who kissed her and put her on her feet and fetched her red flannel petticoat, and then, like a decent man, went out of the room.

Old Mrs. Fountain never wasted any time in praying for herself. She always feared to go out of the world before she had done her best at the throne of grace for those about her. And when she fell down, which she not infrequently did, she always feared it might be the end, and prayed accordingly—for others, not herself.

When Finn got home from the meeting, he smuggled some petroleum out of the cupboard in the scullery and filled his "penny stinker," as the ribald storekeeper called the brass lamps he sold in the little general utility shop at the bottom of the road, just opposite the Methodist chapel, which he flouted on Sundays by tinkering with an ungodly paraffin motor which was in the habit of giving out a series of explosive stinkings as the faithful went into chapel.

This lamp he took up to his room with the sloping ceiling under the slates at the top of the house, sleuthily ignoring his mother's warning: "Now, don't let me find a light under your door ten minutes from now. Wasting the oil indeed!" Mrs. Fontaine had a nasty habit of stealing up the two flights

from the connubial chamber on the first floor to see if Finn was "reading in bed"—a capital sin to which he was much addicted. Finn chanced it, and opened his pamphlet.

It was a fascinating pamphlet in its ashen cover. It started out with confident assertion: "There is no Hell," and proved its hatred of dogma by a series of dogmatic questions, to which it returned a series of perfectly satisfactory dogmatic answers. "Has anyone ever been to hell?" "Has anyone ever seen the devil?" "Has anyone ever come back to tell the tale?" "Has anyone ever seen God?" "Has anyone ever been to heaven?" And wound up by asking: "Are these questions fair and square or are they not?"

Now all this was very fair and square and above board, if not, for some obscure reason which would doubtless later be plain, very satisfying. But what could man have more than the truth? Finn himself was an interrogative animal. He trembled with excitement as he read. Here, anyhow, was assurance and consciousness. The people about him—old Crux at the office, his father and mother and aunts at home, the people he met in trains and churches—none of these had consciousness or certainty. Old Crux, who had sung the Glory Song with the rest at Billy Pickles' meeting the other evening and who gave with both hands to the Salvation Army and to charity, thought nothing of sending half a thousand little investors to starvation by "bulling" or "bearing" the stock market, or, for that matter, of nearly working a clerk to death and then "firing" him, all the time keeping wages down to the bone. His son Parker taught in a Sunday-school, but on week days "operated" without questioning in John L. Crux, Limited, with as little compunction or doubt as its founder.

Yet both men, in their way, were genuine. His father, for all his praying and concealed Methodism, made qualmless statements about Martyr and MacGlusky's products which he knew had no foundation save in an imagination fertilised by competition—that is, until he reached the point when he believed his own prevarications. The curate at the church in the High Road was a regular port wine curate who snobbed to Bishops, who was always talking about "taking a little wine for the stomach's sake," and taking it pretty often. You couldn't expect much of him—but what about his rector, a bearded straight-nosed man of inflexible principle who had



spoken to Finn solemnly about the personal purity and cleanliness of heart necessary for anyone taking the Holy Communion—he called it “the Eucharist”—and then had handed the chalice without a word to old Branberry, the lushy old brewer who owned half a dozen gin palaces, whose life was a running sore, and had even beatified him in a way from the pulpit after he had given the money for the repair of the steeple. And the rector, he had to admit, was an honest man, after his lights. And there was that day when he had seen Blackburn, the great amateur athlete and county cricketer, whom he personally had canonised, get his century against Yorkshire on the county ground. A fine, clean-limbed, lissome specimen of manhood he was, but as he stood outside the dressing room, worshipping distantly at his shrine, he heard him tell his companions a story as he sipped his glass of whisky which even now brought the blood to his face. He himself was a teetotaller and non-smoker—to him tobacco and alcohol were questions of religion, of inner, natural decency—to others, only questions of training or “wind” or convenience.

Finn Fontaine was puzzled to death at the mad world about him—a world illogical and unconscious. Only youth was logical. It sometimes seemed to him that he was made of a different stuff to those others. It was not that they were worse or better. It was only that there was a difference of quality, something basic, unchangeable.

Now he had at last got on the track of logic. It had all this time been hidden in the ashen bosom of the Rationalist Thinkers’ Union, which, instead of going around things, saying and pretending one thing and doing another, sidestepping the obvious and never replying directly to a question, answered a downright “Yes” or “No.” It was all quite simple. “Did God exist or did he not?” The Rationalist Thinkers did not begin to answer in the way of the grown-ups: “Well, it all depends upon what you mean by God. . . .” Instead, they asked another plain question: “Has anyone seen God?” “No.” “Then there is no God.”

Something straggled across the retina of his mind like one of those insects that skate on the surface of ponds: “No man hath seen God at any time.” It disturbed his self-satisfaction. But he got rid of it. “Dogma,” he said. He read on. . . .

The pamphlet showed exactly how the Idea of God had



arisen in the mind of primitive man—that great ape which had risen from all fours to stand upright by reaching after the fruits on the trees, and then to tower over the trees and over the world. How the Jahweh or Jehovah-Jah of the Israelites was only one of a hierarchy of gods—he said that word “hierarchy” over several times, he liked new words and it seemed a sort of sheet-anchor for his new ideas)—only one of a hierarchy of gods, and had been taken over by the early Christian church and finally made into the one anthropomorphic—he said that word also over again and very proud and intellectually stiff-necked he felt when he had done so)—God which that church thought it worshipped to-day. That was all very satisfying. At last he had found anchor-hold in the shifting sands of life.

The penny stinker burned itself out as he neared the last page, which he had to read upon a vast expenditure of matches. It finished with a series of clinchings: “What you can’t see, can’t exist—can it?” “What you can’t prove, can’t exist—can it?” “What nobody has seen can’t be—can it?”

The next few days he went about like a sort of superior ape in a wilderness of monkeys and with a quiet satisfaction which made his grandmother think he was ill. “Do take a herbal, ducky,” she would say, commending her infallible remedy for all ills whether of mind or body. “A good clearing out is what you want, boy.” (She pronounced it “bye,” one of the things that always disgusted his mother.) But Finn preferred his mental constipation and went about looking darkly at his father, mother, and aunts, and saying to himself: “If you only knew how I could smash you all up with your God and your Devil and your heaven and your hell. Is there a hell? Yah! Heaven? Pjah? What you can’t see, you idiots, can’t exist—can it?” And so on. But he never looked darkly on his grandmother.

He even sat down to write a pamphlet himself. This pamphlet was to be different to anything that ever had gone before. It was to cause a revolution in thought. He was simply going to ask a mad world, which at these moments—in the present case for the purpose of his pamphlet—he persuaded himself to be sane, a series of questions, opposite which in a parallel column he set down the answers. Thus:

*Question.*

Is there a God?

*Answer.*

How do you know?

No, that was no good. It was no use answering a question by asking another, which was Finn's usual method, although he did not know it. So he began again:

*Question.*Is there a God?  
Why?*Answer.*No.  
Because you can't see him, and  
what you can't see, can't exist.

That looked better, but savoured of plagiarism. However, he tried again, and at the end of a week had produced a sort of "Magnall's Questions" which made him think that writing was not quite so easy as he had always believed it, a conviction which had originally come to him after the first article he had ever written in his life, written, impellent, after the Tabernacle meeting and the ash-covered pamphlet. This article, which was a more or less sanguinary attack on revelation as revealed at revival meetings, he had sent out to the "British Weekly," and afterwards to the "Church Times," the former having been introduced by his Aunt Bella, who had literary lapses, the latter being the fortifier of his mother's orthodoxy, which, however, she only skimmed—both she and Jemmy were "skimmers." Both had returned to him and in doing so had sandbagged his faith for the time.

Desperate, he had told Father Lestrangle all about it and had given him the MS. which he had written on his typewriter during office hours. (Where art was concerned, Finn was soundly unmoral.) And this MS., in some mysterious way, had appeared in "The Lanthorn," headed by a little italicised note from the editor, who had printed it, he said, as "a light from an unbiassed young mind upon to-day's religion."

Finn thought the article wonderful, although "the unbiassed young mind" stuck for some reason or other in his throat, but it was really very crude.

The MS. of the pamphlet he had begun to write he kept by him in case he could alter it and he began to haunt the bookstalls. There was one with a steeple on the top of it under the shadow of the Mansion House which always had a tray of second-hand books and a very nice young man in

a rather seedy morning coat, who was wont to gaze owl-like from the doorway through two magnifying spectacles which spanned his pimple of a nose, an enlarged one of the many that covered his face. This young man one day having asked him, to his extreme confusion, as to the kind of book for which he was looking, and a conversation ensuing, it eventuated that the pimple-nosed young man was a passionate rationalist, with a determination to believe nothing, which rather upset Finn's ideas about the division of the world into propagandists and indifferents, for he had somehow or other always associated really violent propaganda with the Christians.

It was he who sold Finn an ash-coloured Rationalist Thinkers' "Life after Death?" which proved to Finn the next morning about 4 o'clock that when he was dead he was dead and that was that. He was rather confused and puzzled to find that a draught had begun to blow upon the intellectual self-satisfaction of the previous weeks. It was as though he had let a ghost into a well-warmed house.

He went to sleep and dreamt that the pimple-nosed young man—the same young man, but who somehow, in the way of dreams, was really his father—his eyes ominously enlarged, an ash-covered book in his hand, the other under his coat tails, was standing over him and proving to him, to his own intense satisfaction, that there was no heaven, there was no hell, and soon there would be no Finn Fontaine. He awoke in a cold sweat.

He could hardly meet his father's eye the next few weeks, and suffered, literally, a hell of a time, dragged as he was between intellect and inspiration, with the latter, illogically, pulling deeper. In the mornings he would awake a rationalist, rational to the marrow of his backbone, but as the autumn evenings drew on, he would lapse into superstition and a joyous assurance of immortality.

It was in one of these stages of flux, when all the world seemed to be melting under his feet and when, for the first time, he learned the meaning of "his heart turned to water," Finn flung his big, bony length down by the little stretcher-bed in his room and prayed, his long inexorable nose in his hands: "Oh God! give me assurance—give me certainty!" It was horrible as he crouched there to find how quickly the first flush of feeling was passing. It made him desperate.

"Show yourself oh God! if you exist," he prayed brutally, challenging the Infinite. "Give me a sign."

He looked up, expecting to see something. He looked through the little low window at the stars coming out in the velvet of the autumn night. He did not know what he expected to see—but he did not see it. It was no good. It was all nonsense. The Rationalist Thinkers were right.

But even as he thought it, there came that old longing for infallibility. Above all, the desire to love. Rationalism, somehow, had no room for love.

It was then he discovered that he had never given up the Idea of God, which lay in the depths as something shining in dark waters.

In his despair for a rock upon which to build his beliefs, there ran across his mind Father Lestrangle's: "And upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He would go to the Jesuit.

He found him in a narrow high white-washed study, the walls of which were only broken by a steel engraving of the Jesuit "general" and a common plaster crucifix, the wood of the cross standing starkly against the limewash. It was lighted by a single high window facing a blank wall.

There was an asceticism about the place that repelled him. It was a sort of sterilisation chamber in which ideas were limned with surprising clarity and was the reverse of the sensuousness with which he had always associated the Roman Communion, for, with the exception of that solitary visit to the Westminster chapel, he had never been inside a Catholic Church—"it was the tasting of meats offered to idols," his father had said. His mother had not been so sure.

In that nakedness, he felt like a soul unshrived, naked to some unseen Eye that watched. But he forgot the bareness of the place in the warm, strong handclasp of the tall priest, who in that whiteness looked drawn. But the dark fiery eye rolled itself on him in that intimate humanity which always acted as solvent.

The priest did not give him a chance to blunder into an explanation of this, his first visit. He took the boy over to the bookshelves, taking down book after book, and although he did not interest him, for Finn was always too much occupied with his own thoughts to be too deeply interested in those

of others when they did not bear directly on his own, it served to put him at his ease.

Then it came from him. He told him the story of the rationalist books and waited for the tall man to fall on him. Instead, he took him back to the bookshelves and pointed out to him upon a high shelf a row of ashy volumes. "I have them all here," he said. "And many more." He took down a handful. "Here is one you must read—'Was Christ an Epileptic?' and this other—'An Exposure of Roman Catholicism.' You shall go through them all."

Father Lestrangle looked at the boy, fleetingly. "You have read Renan, of course? You must read his 'Life of Christ.' A beautifully sincere book. Well written. And here is an old friend—Tom Paine. And Voltaire. . . ."

The boy was used to this strange man, but he hesitated a moment as the little choking question came: "But, Father . . . . all these books are . . . . rationalist . . . . infidel . . . . what . . . . I. . . ." He broke off.

The priest with that gracious gesture of his waved him to the hollow of the horse-hair arm-chair, the only thing of comfort in that austerity, as he seated himself opposite on the straight-backed, inflexible piece of oak. "I know, Finn," he said. "I understand. But I want you to read all those—all of them—and when you have read them, Finn, for I know you, you will be several steps nearer heaven. If my Church feared those books—what would my Church be? Infallible? Invulnerable? She would only be the mortal staff of her opponents. Read them.

"Rationalism is as old as literature itself," he went on, "older even than Ecclesiastes. Its cold, clear light has again and again risen upon the horizons of men to drive away the ghosts of the ages. But the ghosts come back."

"But the Rationalists say there is no hell," said Finn, hoping most irrationally that hell existed. He had never wanted that before. "They say there is no fire and brimstone."

"And there isn't," said the priest, smiling at the boy, who felt strangely disappointed. "The rationalists are right. Hell, like heaven, is of the compass of the human heart, in which we carry both—that is, it is broad as the universe—circumscribed as the chalice of passion in which the heart is contained." He got up from his chair, went to the high, white



window and looked out against the blank wall opposite. The dewdrops stood dank on the high, white forehead. There was memory in the face. He turned:

"The word is but the husk. There are so many ways to understand."

"But your church teaches there is a definite hell?" said the boy, who for the moment was angry with the priest. It was the old uncertainty stealing back, even here in this room of certainty. He wanted infallibility. He did not want compromise.

"Why, Finn, you're a better Catholic than I," said the priest. "My church tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. Sometimes it has to speak in symbols, in allegory, like its great Master. 'There are many things I would say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.' Hell may be none the less real because it is a hell of thought. You ought to know that, Finn. Purgatory. We all have our purgatories. And you should know that."

There was a spiritual camaraderie, an understanding, that was subtly delicious to the boy. The Jesuit had taken him up to his level, had admitted him to a brotherhood of equality, of consciousness. But the long nose and the green eyes would not be turned. He wanted "Yes" or "No."

"Then you don't believe in hell—and your church doesn't, Father. Now I know why it is your church does not go out into the street like the Socialists—because it doesn't believe. Why, if people believed"—and now Finn was thoroughly roused and therefore, as always, fearless—"they would rush out into the streets and preach like mad people until they fell exhausted, preach like John the Baptist. If they believed that the cost of unbelief was eternal torture, without hope, endless, they would go mad, and going mad would save themselves. But they don't believe."

The boy sat there, stubborn, contemptuous. No flattery, no compromise, could ever soften the white heat of his temper. That white flame in which he saw all things clearly. He at least did not believe in cool head and cool vision. Vision came in flashes—out of fire.

The Jesuit was silent. He glanced at the boy, in that characteristic fleeting way, and there was love in his look. Even

Finn, catching his glance, saw that, and it puzzled him. It did not mollify. He felt he had to go on.

"Belief," he said. "Nobody believes. Belief is only for Sundays. It is only for another world. Not for this. Why," he said, and he could be very rude when angry, forgetting his natural shyness, "the very building in which we are was raised by that horrid old Duchess of Duckleworth—and everybody knows what her life has been and how she treats her tenants. And your own church holds her high and takes her money and. . . ."

It poured out of him. The lack of consciousness of the world. The segregation of religion for Sundays and churches. The unaccountable shyness of speaking about what should be the most important and most discussed thing on earth. The people called "socialists" anyhow saw this. He had heard one of them, a fiery John the Baptist, at the corner of the road under the "Lord High Admiral." He had shown it up. . . .

"Like your Rationalists, Finn," said the Father, speaking for the first time. "Eh, Finn?"

The boy was silent. Somehow the fires of his rationalism which had blazed up again under the bellows of his indignation were damped. Things with him had a habit of sometimes, in a moment, seeming very far away—of receding like things in dreams. That had always been so. Rationalism seemed only the echo of something, as he sat there.

"Listen, Finn," said the priest gently, and he looked softly on the boy. "There are more ways of cheating the devil than the world knows. And there is a devil. Mr. Asthar the other evening at the Tabernacle was right in that. Satan at least is no figure of speech. We Jesuits are the missionary priests to civilisation—ours is the silent propaganda. To cheat the devil we have often to play him at his own game and use his own weapons," he went on, as though half speaking to himself. "Sometimes we even use him to defeat his own ends . . . . you have mentioned the Duchess," he said, smiling. "If we went out to the street corner and threw revelation at the heads of the people, it would cease to be revelation—it would only be mathematics. The one thing that the people of our times cannot bear is the direct statement—because the people of our times are unconscious—un-



conscious partly because they are living in an age of flux, an age of more spacious horizons, of greater complex. Even a century ago, with narrower horizons, men had a greater consciousness. Consciousness always means limitation.

"Unconsciousness is the devil's weapon and, like the devil, it can only be met by itself, that is, by the weapon of the indirect, the suggestive, but this weapon can only be wielded by those who themselves are conscious. Rationalism, like Socialism, is the religion of consciousness using the direct statement and ignoring the subjective, that is, the spiritual, and Socialism, like the Rationalism that is now dying, will one day also die. We undermine men's souls—not men's intellects. The change in intellect is the change mechanical—the soul-change is a change of substance.

"Our weapon is the symbol—our symbol the Cross—and in that sign shall we conquer," he went on, as though speaking more to himself than to the boy opposite, a trick he sometimes had when talking to Finn, who seemed to act as a stimulus for thoughts that even he himself only understood, "through a glass, darkly." "Our dominion is over the souls of men, by suggestion. Our kingdom is the subjective—not the objective—the invisible, not the visible. The symbolism of the High Mass at Westminster is more potent to conquer than all the direct ravings of the Socialist under its shadow." The jaw set. The eye took harder lights.

"But we do not hide from ourselves that the final battle will be between the direct and the indirect—between Socialism and the Church. The price of life is eternal struggle—between the dogmas of this world and those of the world to come.

"We shall never have religion in the counting-house. We shall never have religion in the weekday. We could never have it till the world was spiritually conscious—and the world will never all be conscious, for spiritual consciousness is only for the few and this world a dwelling place for imperfect souls. Some day the dominion of the Church will extend over the whole world—we are taught to believe that—but when that day comes it means that the great unconscious many will have learned to bow themselves to the spiritual consciousness of the few, that it will be a trained consciousness—a consciousness of suggestion from above, to the great unconsciousness below."

It was with Finn as he walked down the winding drive from the Seminary. A trained consciousness—from above. And now the ashen books seemed very far away.

“He is wrestling with the devil,” his father said, piously.

## VIII

### "BRANDS FROM THE BURNING"

Mr. Trevor Titterling crouched over the kitchen range and cleaned his nails. Occasionally he would place an ochreous finger inside his mouthful of very white, false teeth, with which he would press back the quicks, viewing them afterwards through his ribbonless monocle with a pale and fishy eye to see the effect. All this without removing the dissipated cigarette stump that hung from the corner of his mouth. Nobody had ever seen Mr. Titterling with a whole cigarette.

The scragginess of his lower extremities was, despite the frosty London morning outside, draped in a fine grey cashmere, a large grease spot standing out on the left knee. His feet, clad in silk socks, with an arrow "clocked" up the side, were thrust into what had once been dancing pumps, a "new potato" showing through the left heel. Mr. Titterling rather gave a general effect of faded magnificence.

The head bent towards the red glow showed the scanty nondescript hair parted in the middle and coming down in horns to his sorrowful, pale eyes. His nose, high, pale Roman organ, fell over his weak, humorous mouth, matching the eyes above. His very high collar was a trifle frayed and, in spite of its gloss, looked dirty. But that might have been the light. From above, there came a low voice singing as it moved about the house: ". . . a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emanuel's veins. . . ."

"Now look here, young John the Baptist, chuck it!" he admonished, humorously blasphemous. He stopped for a moment the devil's tattoo which he had begun to play with the poker on the bars of the grate, as his third youngest, a six-year-old with long wire hair, who was engaged in an attempt to emulate Cain, assisted by his elder brother, Plantagenet, who for dramatic purposes was, at this very moment, Abel, and at the same time to avoid Bluggins the bulldog where you come

round by the fender, had gone head first into his father's ribs.

Seymour (the Titterlings had a weakness for fine names) really looked a John the Baptist. You could almost smell the locusts and wild honey as you looked at his hair, and his garments, of a kilt-like nature, were mere superfluity. Seymour, who was the terror of his brothers and sisters, being said by his father to be possessed of a devil, always played the unpleasant parts from the bible, which was the only mental food of the Titterling young, such as Goliath or Cain. Esau was a favourite part. He was a very hairy boy. Once he had tried Herod with a nearly fatal realism for the two youngest. Albemarle, the baby in arms, had a near go.

Occasionally, however, "bears and lions," a zoological drama of a ravening nature, displaced the bible. But this was largely due to that ghostly cellar beneath the house, of a cave-like gloom, which had obviously been made for the purpose.

The other two boys were under the kitchen table making, in the words of their progenitor, a hell of a noise—"and you just wait young Larkin" (that was the second youngest, named after a prospective uncle who had hitherto not matured) "until your mother comes down—playing on Sunday."

They might have been playing, but it looked like the real thing. At that moment, little Elizabeth, aged four, having, through a trifling chronological confusion, as a Christian maiden, been abducted by Esau the Terrible, disguised as Larkin, who, for purposes of actuality, had covered his arms with a pair of rabbit skin mats tied with string, but who loved Jacob, in this case Plantagenet, her body was now being fought for by both gentlemen, who were quietly smothering each other over a supposedly senseless body which was displaying unsuspected qualities of nail. They weren't afraid of "father," who had only to be feared in extreme moments—as, for instance, when he was out of cigarettes.

Mr. Titterling drew in the rest of his cigarette stump, held, and then expelled the mixture of air and tobacco from his lungs.

"Gawd's truth!" he said, jumping into sudden energy—he could be very East-endy at times, from bad associations, could Mr. Trevor Titterling—"Gawd's truth!" He jumped for the table, put down a hand, and, after fishing a little, hooked young Larkin, dragged him into the light of day, and cuffed

him on what he called "the earhole." He then took him by the seat of his obviously reduced father's pants, opened the door, and flung him into the passage, from where such a series of howls escaped that even young Seymour was held up in his wild career. By the time he got back, the kitchen was empty, except for Elizabeth, who sat in the middle of the floor showing rather more red drawer than was perhaps quite consistent with Christian maidenhood.

Mr. Titterling felt in his pocket, "drew a blank" in his own words, and went down on hands and knees to scabble for cigarette stumps in the firebox. Having got one, he lit it, with the calm satisfaction of duty done.

"Shut up! you little devil," he shouted through the door to the howls, which suddenly ceased. There was a noise as of cooing, and the next moment the door opened to admit a little girl-mother, still in her first decade, with grey eyes and hair of smoky-black, leading by his dirty little hand the now quietly convulsive Larkin, who exploded at intervals, geyser-like.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, father," she said. "Just look at Larkin's ear. You know what I said before."

Mr. Titterling looked caught in the act. Depressed, he mumbled something behind his cigarette stump and hung a trifle more over the fire. His eyeglass had disappeared, as it had a habit of doing in moments of abnegation.

The others had come back and were playing quietly. The little mother began to clear away the dirty breakfast things. In a surprisingly short time she had made the place look clean and neat.

"There is a fountain filled with blood. . . .

Drawn from Emanuel's veins,

And sinners plunged beneath that flood. . . ."

The strains in a tempered alto were gradually approaching. The door opened. There stood in the doorway a sweet-faced, grey-eyed woman, her hair of rippling brown smoothly parted in the middle, something of shining wonderment, of revelation, in her eyes. The eyes searched out her husband, now looking sorrowfully into the blaze. A straying shaft of sunlight shone upon her as she stood there, inscrutable, her figure informed by the new life she was soon to give to the world.

Mrs. Titterling had been married to her husband when she was seventeen years old and when he was twenty-five. She was one of those women who love only once, and for ever—who do not know restraint but give all and sanctify sin by sacrifice. She had given everything she had to give to her husband before she married him, and she would never have married him and would have died brokenhearted but for one of his moments of self-abnegation and repentance which made him give his first child a name a month before birth. Since that day eighteen years ago, she had borne him ten children, of whom seven were left. The others had died easily—of whooping cough and pneumonia and in one case at least of underfeeding, for the Titterlings had not always been fortunate in their choice of new neighbourhoods and trusting tradesmen.

How her husband really earned the bread for the house, with its infrequent butter, Mrs. Titterling did not know. Mrs. Titterling was one of those women who never know anything. If anybody had told her—and of course nobody did—that he was a billiard “shark,” irregularly a bookmaker, with a flick of the cards in between, it would have had no more effect than if she had been told that Trevor Titterling got his living by murder. She would not have believed it, and if she had believed it, it would have made no difference. She had a splendid capacity for ignorance. At least, if she suspected anything, she said nothing. She only knew that he was sometimes away for days at a time—especially in the summer, when he would go out dressed in a box-cloth coat, a high white hat and white waistcoat with a pair of glasses slung round him, and return home, sometimes in a devil of a temper, and sometimes hilarious but conscience stricken.

That was Trevor Titterling’s trouble, he could never quite free himself from an inconvenient nonconformist conscience. He was the black sheep of the family—a Strict-Baptist family of inexorable theology who believed that in total immersion lay the only or at least the chief way of escape from hell. His two brothers were perfectly respectable members of society and of a violent religion—one a prosperous west-end dentist, the other a Baptist preacher.

Trevor was only admitted to the paternal roof on sufferance, and the the fatted calf was never killed. If “godless Trevor,”



as his parents called him, had ever given them occasion to do so, they would have been considerably amazed and perhaps considerably annoyed, for he had fallen quite naturally and satisfactorily into place as the horrible example. He was cut out of his father's will, he knew that, damned in this world and of course damned in the next, and the worst of it was that he personally was quite as assured of the reality of the latter damnation as of the former. It was the potent “suggestion” of the first years of life doing its work—the thing that also kept him a teetotaler.

He had been apprenticed to medicine, had had “a shot at” being a missionary, but a green cloth, a piece of ash, and three balls of ivory had upset all calculations. “The billiard table is the road to hell,” as his father put it, and Trevor Titterling had drifted as inevitably into billiards as some men drift into medicine or missionaryship.

He had aptitude extraordinary without the capacity to grind necessary to become a professional, which in billiards is a trifle less difficult than to become a violinist of the first rank. From this into bookmaking, and then into various phases of cards, ending up with “find the lady,” generally known as the three-card trick, was a natural sequence.

His family prayed over him offensively and defensively, and he groaned in unison. His wife prayed, and little Mary, the little grey-eyed mother, prayed. Member of the Spirit's Elect, an offshoot of the Plymouth Brethren, with a dash of Calvinism, Mrs. Titterling had the melancholy satisfaction of knowing that all were predestined—if father was to be saved he was to be saved—if damned, then damned. His family rather felt it would be the latter, deriving therefrom a certain satisfaction. His wife never gave up. She was a woman who would have snatched salvation out of the pit itself.

“Trevor,” said the lady in the doorway, “will you not dress yourself? You know Finn Fontaine is bringing his two aunts this afternoon to tea.”

“Oh! bust Finn and bust his aunts!” said Mr. Titterling inexpressibly. “I haven't got any Toddy's Carnation Flake. I don't dress till I have some. Can't Mary go out and get it?”

“On a Sunday, Trevor,” said his wife, reproachfully. “On the Lord's Day.” She looked heart-broken.



"Oh! bust Sunday too," said Mr. Titterling, throwing his eye-glass into his eye.

"You know Finn is the loneliest boy in the world. He knows nobody but us. Let's be ready for him. He's so sensitive. He'll think we don't want him."

"Yes, father," said little Mary. "I love Finn. He is my own dear boy."

"Why I believe you are in love with him, Mary," said her father. The little thing blushed. "Oh Finn's all right. He's a good sort. But I'm not myself. Got a pain in me stomach. Bust it!" Mr. Titterling was a martyr to pains in the stomach and the head. At least he said so.

The Mr. Trevor who received the little procession in the hall some four hours later was another Mr. Trevor: he was a glossy, not to say dazzling, Mr. Trevor. From his monocle to his patents—one of them with a crack over the little toe—and up to his pomaded hair, he shone. His wife and daughter looked quite drab by the side of him.

First came Aunt Maria with Aunt Judy's nose behind swinging from side to side like one of those big-horn rhinoceroses as she guided Aunt Maria before her, that lady filling up the passage and only revealing Aunt Judy at intervals. Behind all, Aunt Bella, her Choctaw feathers dominating the passage, sniffing, towering, black-avised, and resenting strongly. She was a regular witch-finder and smelt another brand of dissent from her own. She was not going to be shepherded into a rival fold, unprotestant.

Facing them, Mrs. Titterling, smiling a welcome, a little behind her, Mary, all eyes for Aunt Bella, and behind her again, showing a mouthful of two-guinea teeth, not paid for and worth the money, Mr. Titterling himself, who had forgotten to remove the fag-end that stuck on his lower lip corner. Mr. Titterling at these times was politeness itself—a little too anxious as always to show himself a gentleman to be a gentleman. It was something in him that always distressed Finn, who despised and liked him.

In the little drawing room with the tiny piano and the chairs that had never seen better days, Aunt Judy revelled despairingly in her latest congregation—the Spirit's Elect. Aunt Bella—sniff. Aunt Maria fatly sceptical. But all the time little Mary studied the tall black-avised aunt.

Aunt Judy rested her head sideways on the back of the low easy chair, the goat-like eyes looking out through the imitation French windows into the garden. Her sister Maria, who had truncated into her chair, setting herself down layer by layer, looked out vacantly. Aunt Bella sat bolt upright, her black eyes darting from side to side without turning her head, rather like a gigantic fox terrier on the look out for rats. Mrs. Titterling, in her resigned, sweet-faced way, waited for an opening.

It came. Her husband, whose mind was at that moment running upon the scented Carnation Flake cigarettes he hadn't got—he had a tendency to “druggy cigs.” as he said himself—but who smiled excessively, turned to Aunt Judy: “Beautiful weather for this time of the year,” he said, looking vaguely towards the French window.

“If it doesn't rain,” replied Aunt Judy, who was in a pessimistic mood.

“Why should it rain? Don't be ridiculous, Judy,” said her sister Bella. “Some day you may be glad for a drop of rain,” she remarked cryptically. She sniffed. It was one of Aunt Bella's sniffing days. Aunt Judy laughed her little heartbroken laugh and held her silence.

“We should be thankful,” said Aunt Maria, largely. “If it rains, it is good for the crops—if it doesn't it is good for us.” One eye wandered in a trifle towards the base of the nose.

“True, quite true,” said Mr. Titterling, taking a very dirty pocket handkerchief from his pocket with an air. “True.” He placed his high Roman organ within its folds and trumpeted genteelly. (“It's a bloody awful world,” he said to himself.)

“Some day we shall all be satisfied,” remarked Aunt Maria piously. “And how beautiful that will be.”

(“Yes, when there's skating in hell,” confided Mr. Titterling to his monocle, which he had dropped into his left hand for cleaning purposes.) “Beautiful indeed,” he said, faintly echoing to the unconscious lady.

“Oh! how beautiful it will be when we meet in a better world,” continued Aunt Maria, encouraged, and developing quite a flow of conversation.

“Take care we don't meet in Another Place,” jerked Aunt

Bella vindictively, in a dark, prophetic voice. "*Even* though Finn is too clever to believe in it. Rationalist literature!" She sniffed.

Little Mary for the first time turned her great grey eyes from Aunt Bella to her nephew. She looked at him in horror.

"It's not true," she said.

The little assured voice fell like the swing of a sword in that atmosphere of constraint.

"Crickey! She's put the kybosh on it!" said Mr. Titterling in a whisper which was audible to Aunt Bella, who had ears like a lynx.

"How are the friends opposite?" said Aunt Maria, muzzily diplomatic. Paying her first visit to the Titterlings, and knowing nothing at all about it, Aunt Maria had conjured up "the friends" from her well of good intentions.

"Finn," said little Mary. "You *know* there's a hell, don't you?"

"He'll know it some day," said Aunt Bella, sniffing again and jerking her head downwards in the way that she had. The scar twitched on her face. "Won't he, Mrs. Titterling?"

"If he's predestined, he's predestined," said Mrs. Titterling with that calm sweet face of hers as she looked out through the window.

"He's predestined to salvation, mother," said Mary, solemnly, and then compressed tightly her little red lips.

"How do you know, Mary?" asked Aunt Bella, her eyes turning sharply on the child, the head following quickly. "Do you know what I caught Finn reading? 'Was Christ an Epileptic?' What do you think of that? Now perhaps you're not so sure." She looked more like a giant fox terrier than ever—but a terrier that had pounced.

Mr. Titterling's glass fell into his lap unheeded and rolled on to the floor. He stared at Finn in dismay uncontrollable.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said religiously under his breath.

Aunt Judy, her great nose still resting against the back of her chair, turned one eye upon Finn. It was a curious, not a frightened eye.

Mrs. Titterling sat there perfectly sure and placid. She was not shocked. In a world where only the handful of the Spirit's Elect were to be saved and where everything was determined

from the beginning, this thing did not matter—nothing mattered.

Finn through all this sat without speaking. Now, Mary had moved over to him, stood by his side, and placed a slender arm around his shoulders.

"I don't want to go to heaven," she said.

"Blasphemy! blasphemy!" said Aunt Bella. "You wicked child." But Mrs. Titterling sat unmoved. Her husband alone ventured on a "Chuck it! Mary."

"I don't want to go to heaven if Finn won't be there," the little thing said.

Aunt Maria sat in unspeakable terror, the left eye, semi-eclipsed, rolling widely and independently under its flickering eyelid. "She know not what she sayeth," she murmured, religiously ungrammatical.

The child had clung tighter to the boy, who had put up one big bony hand over her arms. "I will go wherever you go, Finn," she said, tensely. He pressed her arm.

"Better to be in hell with you, than heaven with those others," she whispered despairingly, looking at Aunts Bella and Maria. "Only for mother. . . ." She broke off, wistful. "And father. . . ." She brightened. "But perhaps father will be with us . . . . and perhaps . . . ." she hesitated one breathless moment, "perhaps God would let mother come to us, or . . . let us come to mother. Perhaps there is nothing fixed for ever. Perhaps . . . if prayer can do things here, why not there? When people love . . . ."

She looked out into the coldly westering sun, a light in her eyes.

"Shall we pray?" asked Mrs. Titterling suddenly. "Finn will lead us in prayer."

"I'm not going to stay in any place where an infidel prays," said Aunt Bella, decidedly. "Come, Maria," she said. "Come, Judy."

She bowed darkly and distantly to Mrs. Titterling and went towards the door with the art muslin curtain over it, followed by her fat sister, who was obviously in a mazy condition, and, as she said, when they got outside, "ready to go off."

Mr. Titterling sprang to his feet and opened the door, bow-

ing ceremoniously as he did so, his politeness being marred by young Seymour who at that moment dashed along the hall in one of his forays and cannoned Aunt Maria, who promptly sat down in the passage. (Aunt Maria always went to earth in moments of stress, for safety's sake.) Mr. Titterling picked her up, cursing her heartily as he did so, under his breath, his monocle staring glassy at her bonnet which sat over her left ear. He got them to the door.

"It is a beautiful evening," he said. Aunt Bella's sniff, as she went out of the gate, was his only answer.

But Aunt Judy had stayed behind.

He went into the kitchen to potter for cigarette ends in the fender. When he got back to the room, Finn was shooting out three inches of white sock from his foreshortened trousers where he knelt by the window, praying. Mrs. Titterling, her face sunk in her hands, her beautiful hair, smoothly braided down over the white slender neck, was kneeling by the music stool, Mary by her side, her smoky hair tumbling down to hide her face. Aunt Judy was kneeling, but he could see the outline of her nose where she had turned to watch Finn through her hands.

Mr. Titterling himself looked a moment, and then sank down, stirred by those emotions which swept so easily over him, placed his distinguished organ between his slender white hands, first removing his eyeglass, and listened.

" . . . . I don't believe in you, oh God," Finn was saying. "You know I don't. And yet I do believe. I don't believe in your hell, but perhaps I believe in your heaven. You can't threaten me, oh God! If you exist, show the proof, the light. But, oh God! I want love. I want to love—I want to save the world—to save myself. . . ." He had passed from stereotyped recital to that blank unconsciousness of environment which sometimes possessed him, in a voice, still in the breaking stage, grotesque in its sudden jerks into the high pitches of adolescence, that came gustily but surely from behind the two big lean hands which stuck themselves out of the frayed coat. It ceased. Finn had remembered that he was not alone. He pressed his hot blushes back into his face.

Mrs. Titterling had risen. She had come over to the boy who now stood upright, and her eyes were shining. "Love—

Finn—” she said, and the voice trembled a little. “Love. Yes—that’s it. Perhaps love can do all. Perhaps love is stronger even than predestination.”

She looked out into the dying sun—and a veil fell over the clear shining eyes.



## IX

### THE FIGHT FOR POWER

Finn Fontaine was in the scullery, his foot on a high rickety stool, trimming his trousers and blackening with the end of one finger, which he inserted gingerly into a tin of blacking, a crack in his boot. His arms had pushed themselves a trifle more since the preceding year through the sleeves of a morning coat by which the Kensington Clothiers, Limited, with branches throughout the City, had justified the last word of their title. This was unfortunate, as Finn's shirts had passed the stage of trimming and had reached that other when the edges become serrated torture. In the winter, his wrists, unequal to the strain, sometimes showed tendency to fissure.

The occasion was important. Crux, Unlimited, having twice assured him of their disinterestedness in refusing a rise to a boy of eighteen, which, Parker Crux himself, who always attended to such matters, said, upon the authority of his father, had been known to send youth to the devil, "cigarettes and the theatre and even worse," Finn had been writing, literally, furiously. He would have written anyhow. He could no more help writing than talking, because, despite an unusual capacity for silence, he wanted to tell the world what he thought of it.

That is to say, being unjustifiably elevated by the printing of his first article on the Tabernacle meeting, he had sent several others, including some on Ireland, after sundry talks with Father Lestrangle, to Lanthorn, who, the novelty of a youth's impressions having worn off, impressions with a crude power as entirely unsuspected by their author as their immaturity, "did not want any more just now." He had discovered that the original editor was a sort of gelatinous but tentacled creature, which clouded itself in streams of inky vagueness, with a maw that swallowed everything and gave out nothing, and which for each tentacle cut off by the victim, that is the



literary aspirant, sprouted two in its place to draw him in and choke him down into the gulf of oblivion.

In spite of his borrowing the office paper, which, having a narrow conscience, he always meant to replace at some future date, and the office time, which from Parker Crux he knew to be invaluable and therefore quite irreplaceable, in furtherance of his literary aspirations, his offerings remained sacrifices. He did not spare himself troublesome ingenuity either. Sometimes he wrote long confidential covering-letters to his editors, and sometimes he even tried to bribe the Almighty by promising perfectly impossible performances if some particular MS. stayed out, always, to his surprise, without success.

Amongst the many things he could not understand at this time was why "The Churchman" and "The British Weekly" did not print his contributions upon churches and chapels. He had so much to tell them about Christianity which they obviously did not know.

Now, Finn, who was a very shy but very desperate boy, found himself impelled to one of those periodic determinations which never seemed to lead anywhere. He was about to see Lanthorn himself at the office of "The Lanthorn."

He had no appointment. Finn's method was the storm-method. When he came under the great lantern in Chandos Street, and, entering, presented himself outside the swing doors in his abbreviated morning coat and trousers with the bowler hat that perched itself loftily upon his uncut hair, to shadowily survey the interior, the commissioner kept a broody, not to say, bodeful, eye upon him.

"Thought 'e was arter the gamps," he said afterwards, conscience-stricken, as, in his own words, "the guv'nor saw the gent first blow-off."

"The guv'nor" sat behind his mahogany with that far-away moist eye which Finn knew from the Tabernacle meeting. He waved him to a chair with a friendly air of equality which brought the boy's heart to him, and rose as he shook hands with him.

Finn told his story of failure with many hot blushes and an expenditure of perspiration preposterous upon a rather chilly September afternoon. Lanthorn listened. "What was he to do?"

Lanthorn jumped up suddenly with a quick nervous gesture. "I was just going out to see Thrum. Come along with me and get the advice first hand from the man who holds the world in the net of his newspapers."

Finn knew that the man opposite him had interviewed the Czar and the Sultan and had talked to both like a journalistic father confessor. But Thrum. That was different. Thrum wasn't a man, but a newspaper. Thrum was "The Earth," the newspaper which he owned and edited. Thrum did not call his paper "The Daily this or that." Just "The Earth." And left it.

It seemed only the next moment that he, a palpitating and sweaty Finn, was seated with Lanthorn before a massive writing table, upon which stood a bust of the German Emperor, whilst two yards behind stood Thrum, a frockcoated man with shining coal-black hair, parted at the side to sweep formidably down across the brown, stinging eyes, matching the short, crinkled black moustache from which, clenched between the white teeth, jutted craggily a long black cigar. He was one of those tall men of a powerful corpulence with a tendency to shortness of limb, and his diminutive hands and feet were of a part with the short snub nose with the pugnacious lump at the end. He had an ugly—that is the only adjective—jaw, and the eye above was luminous with power.

But the thing to which Finn's attention kept returning was the lock of white hair which almost fell into his eyes and, lying apart from the rest, had a personality of its own. He was to learn that this lock, the index of the great man's temper, was in constant uproar upon Thrum's head.

Lanthorn had explained the presence of Finn, towards whom the man with the cigar nodded shortly, and then both he and Thrum had forgotten the boy in a conversation which seemed to come to him from a great distance. Finn never knew how he got the impression that Lanthorn was trying to induce the great man, for some unexplained reason, to tell him the religion behind his newspaper. It seemed to him he had caught the words—or was it a thought?—" . . . everything and everybody, every newspaper as every atheist, has a religion. I want to tell the world in the columns of 'The Lanthorn' the religion, the faith, behind 'The Earth'. . . ." Then there had been another interminable stream and then . . .

"We pull the strings, and the kings dance. I have my church throughout the world—'The Earth' is its temple. A temple not made with hands—its faith, the faith imperial—the faith of, in, power—that is the foundation of all faith and of all faiths. But that is not for publication."

It came incredibly out of the maze of thought which had risen in the boy's mind—this voice of low, insistent concentration. This man also was a propagandist, of a terrible, narrow consciousness, preaching, like Billy Pickles, a new faith.

Then he remembered, hazily. It came to him like the sound of distant trumpets, a ghostly fanfare that seemed to have run through all the leaders he had ever read in "The Earth" that was his father and mother's second bible. Not that Thrum's name ever appeared. It was kept as steadily out of the columns of his own paper as his picture out of the general press, a personality that held all the threat and imminence of a ghost before materialisation. But the rumble of the voice, as of those leaders, was Thrum's, that name which in his mind was like the approach of one of those big express engines when, as a boy, he listened to them with ear to the rails as they thundered, still invisible, towards him over the sleepers. It was the name that stood for religion and power—a *Fidei defensor* for an Imperial Dogma that was to him, still, cloudy and undefined.

To the millions who read it on the waterless plains of Australia, in the snows of Canada, on the South African karoo, as throughout the homes of the mother country, the man with the name like distant thunder stood for religion—for the empire—above all, for power.

The voice was low. Low but heavy and pregnant. When he spoke, it was like that evening with Billy Pickles—it was as though something behind him were speaking. He stood there, one little white hand grasping his cigar as it might have been a sword, and talked. And as he talked, Finn noticed a terrible concentration—but also a terrible genuineness. This man, he knew, was an idealist—would give the last half-penny of his millions to carry through the thing in which he believed. Money to him was nothing—it was only the frank to power. The attacks upon his honesty in the complacent columns of certain newspapers which had been left about Ash Villa by his Aunt Bella, who subscribed to a rival organ,

seemed like the pea-shooters of gamindom against a strong man armed.

This man was a white oxygen flame, so tense and concentrated that he could have melted and often did melt the locks of that poor average humanity which, in order to keep the solitary treasure of its soul, it instinctively sets against the masters of its destiny, and Finn felt something of this.

He was afraid. He needed all his self-belief, that splendid boyish exaggeration of confidence, to prevent himself from being cowed into running from the place. But it was the man's indifference as he spoke that really impressed him as indifference always impressed him, because he himself was indifferent to nothing. It was the predestination of the Spirit's Elect. It held an assurance without cavil.

His eyes fell absently on Finn, fell on his poor clothes, his singular appearance, and Finn wondered, even as he feared, how he dared to look at him from the entrenchment of his well-fitting clothes and his millions. There seemed something shameful in it—shamefully unfair.

"And your young friend?"

"Oh yes," said Lanthorn as though coming out of a dream. "He wants to write. Doesn't want to have his manuscripts returned. He says he writes things to have them printed. Queer fellow. What do you advise?"

"What does he want to write?" asked Thrum as though they were speaking of some specimen under glass.

"He wants to write on the Universe," said Lanthorn, a-twinkle.

"Hum!" rumbled the big man. He took out a crocodile skin case which, like his clothes, was plain but good. There was nothing ostentatious about Thrum except "The Earth." After he had offered the case to Lanthorn, who lit the strong cigar with gusto, he took another cigar for himself, lit it from the ashes of the last, and, as he did so, fastened that formidable gaze upon Finn.

"Better stick to the earth," he said, shortly. "Safer. I do."

Finn despised him for his earthiness, but the "I do" angered him. Did Thrum think that because he did something, Finn Fontaine should also do it? That was preposterous. But he was too overawed to say anything. Overawed, and yet, as

he so often found himself, in a very real sense unimpressed and unconvinced.

"Listen, Lanthorn," went on Thrum, still with that air of Finn's non-existence. "Did you ever hear of the 'Chrysalis?'"

"You mean that halfpenny comic that I am always catching my office boys reading in office hours?"

"Yes—and if you go into the other offices of this country you'll find exactly one and a quarter millions of other office boys doing the same.

"It was away back in the days when fighting was fun. Now it's slaughter. I had just got through with my first real success—that crimson-covered weekly—"The Taleteller.' Bought it for an old song—" he stopped a moment to look with satisfaction at the long grey ash that had formed on the end of his delicately pointed cigar. He continued: "Well, I started the 'Chrysalis.' Oh I'm not ashamed of my half-pennies—"The Earth' itself costs only a halfpenny. The British Empire rests on the halfpenny.

"Well, the 'Chrysalis' didn't go. But its editors did. I sacked three in six months.—Never keep a failure Lanthorn. Let him start again elsewhere. Success is the condition of living.—One day there came a knock to my door and when I shouted 'Come!' I found a youngster of sixteen standing there. A white-faced young devil he was, with a bright eye and pale wispish hair—all nerves and eagerness. 'What d'ye want?' I asked.

"'I want the "Chrysalis," Sir,' he said.

"I thought he'd been drinking or something, but that eye of his held me.

"What do you want to do with it?" I enquired.

"'Want to make it go,' the young devil said. 'I'll double its circulation in six months,' he says. 'Not enough blood and fun in it. Too moral, Sir,' he said. 'I'm an office boy meself. I know.'

"I reached for an editor's contract form.

"How much are you getting?" I said. "What are you—office boy you say?"

"'Yes Sir—fifteen bob.'

"All right, we'll call it five pounds a week plus percentage. If it goes, well and good. If it doesn't you do. Right?"

"'Quite right, Sir,' he said.



"In six months he had trebled the circulation of 'The Chrysalis.' In twelve, he owned a motor-car—and to-day, he is only twenty-two, he has a couple of houses and is thinking of a yacht." He paused a moment, looked absently at Finn, and added:

"But he didn't get that, writing on the universe—he held to old mother earth."

This man might have his head in the clouds, as mediocrity alleged, but he had his feet rooted in solid earth.

Finn caught the note of omnipotence. His heart sank. He hated this man with a sort of impersonal hate, but he feared him, too. He recognised in him an enemy. Not his enemy, but something more, something other. He felt hopeless about his writing—that writing which was to be his escape from Crux—hopeless about everything. He only wanted to get on the other side of the door, which, however, solved his troubles by opening.

A smart young white-haired secretary, frock-coated and a respectful echo of his master, entered the room and held a card on a level with Thrum's eyes. Thrum glanced and called:

"Come right in, Asthar. Here's Lanthorn. Tells me you raised hell the other evening at Billy Pickle's circus. Come right in."

But it was not a man who came through the doorway. It was a girl, a girl with something hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed, that reminded Finn of an engraving of Eve he had once seen in an old bible commentary, beloved of his grandmother.

She stood for a moment, hesitating, looked from Thrum to Lanthorn and passed through Finn, who had risen awkwardly with some misty memories of "Manners for Men" in his mind. He had had social ambitions, had Finn.

She was a girl with a curious length of line, although she was little if anything above middle height. Everything about her was slenderly graceful. As she moved, her dress of some fine blue cloth revealed unsuspected beauties of limb.

As she moved quickly across the room, where the sun coming through the window seemed to tangle itself in the hair of bushy tawn that was cut short to the neck, her eyes to Finn were as darkling, shining water upon which a shaft of sunlight is lying, with a gleam of blue like the flash of a kingfisher's wing as it slants across it.



There was something shy, yet bold, about her as she went up to Thrum and held out her hand with a queer little impulsive gesture.

"Here, Thrum," said the big man in the doorway, who had come a little behind, "I've brought Deirdre here because she insisted. What do you think she wants to do?"

"What?" said Thrum smilingly as he threw away his cigar.

"She wants to write."

"What, another?" said Lanthorn, who had shaken hands with both as with old friends. They all ignored poor Finn, who had shrunk back into a corner but who felt anger at heart. He hated them all, this girl, Thrum, and especially the big man.

"I don't know what my father will say," went on Paris Asthar. "He disapproves strongly of girls writing or doing anything but looking picturesque. However, if you know Deirdre you'll know it doesn't much matter what he thinks. With Deirdre nothing matters except . . . Deirdre."

All at once he turned to catch sight of Finn, in the corner, his eyes fastened on the others. The prominent eye softened with understanding. He saw the neglected boy with the awkward arms in the ill-fitting clothes, and in a moment, Paris Asthar who, for all his vanities, never left misery untouched, turned half towards Lanthorn, enquiring.

Lanthorn, who seemed to be coming out of one of his day-dreams, recollected himself. "Mr. Fontaine," he said. "A young friend."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Fontaine," said the big man, going up to Finn and pressing his hand. "You have a distinguished name. One of my French ancestors was a Fontaine."

Finn put out a clammy hand, the sweat bursting from his forehead. He found it enclosed in one that was warm and dry.

"My sister," said Paris Asthar.

Deirdre bowed distantly and a trifle contemptuously. At least Finn thought so, and sweated again. He hated her.

The face, with its rather short, straight nose, softened as it turned to Thrum, with that half shy, half impulsive way.

"Well, what are you going to do about it? as the Americans say," she asked, challenging Thrum.

"What do you want to do, Miss Deirdre? Write for 'The Earth?'" He said it in a way that left no doubt as to where he thought his paper stood. It was "The Earth."

The girl looked out at him, made as if to speak, hesitated, and then said, urgently:

"You needn't imagine your 'Earth' is above the contributions of imperfection. The earth is not meant to be perfect—not even your 'Earth'—it is a place of passage for imperfect souls . . . like you, and me," she added after a moment, laughing.

The big man was about to say something. For all his smile, there was thunder in his eyes.

But the girl had drawn in to herself again, hiding behind the veil of her hair which she shook around her face.

"There is somebody else here who wants to write for 'The Earth,'" inserted Lanthorn, looking towards Finn.

"Oh, that," said the girl disdainfully, peering out of the veil of her hair for a moment. It was a pity. It spoiled all the beauty of her face, which lost its soft flexibility, its lights and shades.

"Oh! I'm so hot," she said impulsively. "I'm going to take off my hat."

And take it off she did without further comment, throwing it down on the table and shaking back the hair from her eyes, to show the delicate curves of brow and a new pair of eyes which now had something of hazel-grey in them. She was like a spoiled child. But Thrum only laughed.

Finn had drawn back into himself again, not knowing whether to go or to stay. He felt profoundly miserable but unafraid, as he looked at the back of the slender blue figure crowned by its tawny halo. To him she was the incarnate presentment of all that he had ever hated—fine clothes and fine houses and leisure and cultivated voices and manicured nails and perfume—especially perfume—he could catch it stealing to him, impalpable, from her body.

And there was Thrum. Yes, he owned 'The Earth,' but he did not own the soul of a single man who could hold himself free. And Asthar, now fanning himself luxuriously in the overheated room as he lounged in his chair—that was the young spendthrift who was the talk of London, about whom

the papers were always hinting dreadful unknown things on which Finn had puzzled so often. Yes, he was another degenerate.

And then it all seemed ridiculous. Thrum was no degenerate but a man of formidable strength. And Asthar . . . he had spoken kindly to him—he could no more hate him than he could hate Lanthorn. Yet he hated them all—except Lanthorn. But that was a sort of spleen—an unreasoning spleen from which he had always suffered.

“What do you want to write?” Thrum was saying as he came out of himself. “I want new blood. I want youth. I am youth’s man.” He was looking at Finn as he said it.

It was as though he had been galvanised. It was opportunity knocking at his door. Oh! to let her in before it was too late. He felt as he had felt in his nightmares, as he felt with that veiled dream figure he followed down the twisty lane. He choked a moment. . . .

But the girl had made as if to speak, coming out once more from the veil of her hair. She should not. She should not get in his way. For the time, Finn was a crushing destructive animal which would have killed anything that got in its path. He had a kind of frenzy against this dilettante—this girl who, rolling in money, only wanted to pass her time. To him, his writing was life and death. It meant something—not to himself but to the world. There was so much he wished to say.

Then it came, full-mouthed: “Let me write on Ireland!” he erupted. “My grandmother has talked to me about nothing else since I was a baby. And Father Lestrangle, who is an Irishman, has told me much more. I read your leaders every day on Ireland, Mr. Thrum. My father reads ‘The Earth.’” —He hesitated an instant, then blurted it out: “They are nonsense. I don’t know why—but they are nonsense. They are old. You want youth—why don’t you let youth write? I know nothing of Ireland direct, but your leader-writer knows less.”

“Pity my poor father!” murmured Paris Asthar. “If he could only be here. Shades of Delphi! (It was old Asthar who wrote the Irish leaders for Thrum.)

“What do you know about Ireland?” asked Thrum.

"What do I know? I know—I know. . . ." Then it came to him that he did not know . . . yet he did know.

"I know everything." The words came blatant, shameless. It was as though old voices were speaking to him and through him. It was as though the things of a dead past were whispering to him. "I am going to Ireland for my holidays," he said. "Let me write."

The girl surprised out of her disdain had partly turned to look at this strange incursion. This ridiculous scarecrow of a boy with his bony arms and foreshortened poverty, standing there talking like a mad thing. She looked at him a moment, the little lips half opened, the eyes bright. Then she turned, disdainful, to her former position.

"Let him write," said Lanthorn. "He'll do it. I'll put my head on it. And I have seen some of his Irish stuff. I never made a mistake yet about a writer. . . . It is not he who will write," he said in the allusive way he sometimes had. "There will be others behind."

"Yes, let him write, Thrum," said Asthar. "Give him a chance. You've never been talked to like that before, have you?"

"All right," said Thrum, looking at Deirdre Asthar, but speaking to Finn, and thinking of how often he had made similar mad experiments and how often they had succeeded. "Send me some articles upon the Irish question. I don't guarantee to print them, but I will consider them." He hesitated a moment.

"But what is the Irish storm-centre to-day? It is always shifting?"

"Dunhallow," said Asthar's half-sister, putting her head out for a moment. "That is where I was born."

"I say, old chap, you come to my place in Westminster after your return. I'd like to have a talk with you," said Paris to the boy whose pulses were hammering.

All at once the girl put her hand out as though to check him. "No—no!" she said as though half to herself. She flushed to her eyes.

And thus was joined the battle for the soul of Finn Fontaine, though only one person there knew it, and that was not Finn.

But what could you expect a boy to know who did not discover until long afterwards that when he thought Thrum had been speaking to him as he asked: "What do you want to write?" because he had been looking at him, Thrum had really been speaking to Deirdre Asthar.





PART II  
IRELAND



## X

### IRELAND

John L. Crux, Unlimited, had had his eye on Ireland. Hitherto, he had only had his eye on the world. It was a hard, grey, bitten eye. There it stood, as he looked at the map, cut off from the rest of Europe, its heart, despite the four millions it had sent across the Atlantic as hostages to fortune, as untouched by Big Business as though its inhabitants lived on another planet. Ireland had to be gathered in. John L. Crux, with business houses in London and New York, from which he controlled operations of a delicate complexity, was the man to gather it.

"Big Business," he said into the long face of his son Parker, who sat on the other side of his desk gnawing his underlip and patting into position one refractory hair across the high, hatchet-shaped dome, "will be the saviour of Ireland." He spoke with a certain solemnity. "The Lord is on the side of big business . . . look how it succeeds." The argument was unanswerable.

"I've had my eye on the south for some time. It's rather outside the business of the firm, but I think a few hundred thousand dollars sunk in the herring fishery with a plant for drying the fish is going to give cent. per cent. It's a sure thing. We could knock Scotland out, Parker. The Irish are a lazy lot but they haven't learned the tricks of Trades Unionism . . . as yet. Fellows there think they're doing well when they pull down five dollars a week, I'm told. Do 'em good to work 'em hard. It's a great chance for them—and for us."

The eye of granite, a tiny light in it, screwed itself out into Salisbury Circus, as though it would bore, gimlet-like, through space, the jaw set into its socket with a click that might have been the false teeth but might have been bone

itself. One sinewy hand clutched the edge of the desk, until the long nails marked the mahogany.

"There are blackberries and mushrooms—jam factories—pickle factories . . . ." he added irrelevantly.

Parker's jaw fell a trifle over the high white collar, under which the tie adjusted itself in millimetres. It was his way of nodding.

"There's a place called Black Rock." The old man pointed it out on the map before him, a queer little nick, due south. "I'm told they're a barbarous lot down there—call 'em the Black Rock Turks—speak only Irish. Papists." The last word came from the steely jaws as though it were vermin that had escaped.

"We'll send Slick over. Make 'em Primitive Christians."

He went on as though it had only been an interjection, as he passed one hand back the length of his hairless skull and nape. "Heavy weather down there—dangerous coast—these Turk fellows go out in their half decked boats to wrecks—see what they can get their hands on, I expect—and make a good living by it and by life-saving." The voice was like a saw. "Fine fishermen, but apt to get their clumsy boats—'hookers' they call them—dashed to pieces. They want new boats. New gear. What they want is Steam!" He paused a moment. "Steam and a breakwater. Should like to electrify them, but they're too far back for that. There's money in it, Parker. And the saving of souls."

It sounded a queer mixture, but the man who was speaking was in deadly earnest. One had only to look at his face to see that.

"To the glory of God! Crux, Unlimited," said Parker, his long white face breaking up like the ice on a pond under a sudden thaw. It was not a smile. It was a break up. Just that. It was his nearest approach to humour, and it hurt.

The recalcitrant hair was now in place. He folded one smooth white hand over the other and laid them both upon the striped trousering that draped his long thighs.

"Whom shall we send?" It was Parker speaking. "We only want an intelligent underling to spy out the land and give us a general idea in the beginning."

"That's settled. Here's a letter from Thrum. Got a hunch to send young Fontaine to Ireland to write for 'The Earth.'

I don't know many of our people, not half a dozen in a hundred, and wouldn't know young Fontaine only that I've seen him taking down your letters once or twice. Didn't know he could write—did you?"

Parker's long face took on a shocked expression. "I'm afraid Fontaine has been neglecting his work. I've used him at a pinch when Miss Potts was ill. A queer fellow. Heard him one day holding forth on art to a youngster named Jackson in my department. Thinks himself an artist. Says artists are different from all other people. My conviction is that he has been writing on the sly. Young fool. . . ."

"'He that calleth his brother a fool . . .'" interrupted his father. He said it solemnly enough.

"Sorry, father." A faint flush stole to the white cheeks before him. The thin lips muttered a moment as though in prayer. "I mean a fool to his own interests. And besides, it is rank dishonesty tiring himself out at night and so giving the firm poor service the next day. Though I must say Fontaine works hard enough," he added, obviously trying to be fair. "But, how would I put it? . . . his heart is not in his work."

"Well, Thrum tells me that the boy is going to Ireland for his holidays and wants us to give him an extended vacation. We couldn't refuse Thrum if we would. His 'Earth' helped us with that disgraceful strike at the Sulanda works. And he wants him to go to a place called Dunhallow which is the nearest town to Black Rock.

"Now I'm going to give this boy the chance of his life. He has Irish blood in him and therefore he has brains,"—Crux spoke with all the American's admiration for the Irish race—"and he shall go over and kill two birds with one stone. For us he shall report on Black Rock and its possibilities. If he does it the right way, he is a made man."

John L. Crux spoke like a man who knew himself to be possessed not only of all the attributes of Benevolence, but, the thing that mattered, the power to give them effect.

And so it was arranged.

Before Finn went to Ireland, he called on Mrs. Titterling and his little friend, Mary, to say good-bye. The immediate result was that Mrs. Titterling took him into the back drawing-room and prayed with and for him as for one who was

going to the home of "the Scarlet Woman." There were also points in her supplication at the throne of grace over which she hovered in prayerful doubt, from which Finn inferred that Mr. Titterling had had "a good day," with corresponding uneasiness even to his unsuspecting spouse, whose eyes were beginning to open under an unwonted succession of bank notes.

So far as Finn's family was concerned, it, generally speaking and always excepting his little grandmother and Aunt Judy, who was in one of her flaunting desperate stages and therefore, according to Mr. Titterling's liberal interpretation of her mood "didn't care a damn," regarded him very much as though he were going into the West African bush. His mother talked about the "wild Irish," especially before his grandmother, who looked across at the hard brown eye in her soft-eyed, glistening, prayerful way. Jemmy, despite a sneaking sympathy with his mother, really believed his wife to be correct and viewed the experiment with a doubtful eye. So far, Finn had said nothing about Thrum.

Ireland, in spite of "that great, good Mr. Crux" and his interest in it, came to Mrs. Fontaine as a place where people bedded with the pigs, lived exclusively upon a potato diet (the skins played a prominent part in her imagination, if not as an edible, then as clothes—she was not sure which), and were Romanists of an order not far removed from the heathen themselves, with a tendency to landlord shooting by moonlight and general subversive low-typed rebellion. For her part, she always saw the Irishman, a long-lipped, slightly superior modification of the gorilla, in knee breeches and lidless topper, crossed by a dirty clay pipe, crawling behind ditches with a blunderbuss loaded to the muzzle with rusty nails, and always under a full moon.

But little Mary Titterling had pulled his head down and had kissed him gravely on the lips as she whispered: "I wish, Finn dear, you could take me to Ireland. I love Ireland. I once had a book of Irish Fairy Tales but mother took it away." She had pressed herself against him in her child-passion, and had then run out of the room.

And so it was that Finn Fontaine came one evening of golden September into Dunhallow, where it lay in grey and gold under the purple shadows of Croagh Cromlech. As the toy train with the green engine puffed its way from between



the bluffs out into the sunlight of an old stone causeway which spanned the tideway, he saw stretched before him the spacious calliper-like sweep of Dunhallow Bay lying in its opalescent greens, shot by the fires of the sun, with the black menace of the head of Carrickmore bounding it on the right, with a spawn of white-washed cabins clustered like mushrooms at its foot. On the other side of the bay, the low dear country running to the left point of the callipers where the white lighthouse stood like a ghost by the edge of the sea. Between the points, in midchannel, the black shadow of the Carrickdhuv rock showing its fangs above the eternal hiss and roar of the tides that even in dead calm muttered uneasily upwards from the cauldron that boiled beneath.

Then, behind, another and smaller callipers of grey and silver where the harbour with its circle of quarried limestone connected with the great bay by a narrow neck of water, over which hung the shadow of a ruined castle, through which the tide ran like polished jade, strong and smooth; and then behind again where another and still smaller circle of water, fed from the harbour through the gullet of the red sandstone bridge where the waters choked and gurgled, brimmed to the distant foothills at the foot of Croagh Cromlech.

Somewhere, sometime, he had known the old bridge, the green tides, the purple mountains. It was all as dear and as familiar as a place seen in a dream.

Above his head, a flight of starling travelled like winged quarrels over towards Croagh Cromlech on their long migration. Somehow, from then, Dunhallow was always with him as a flight of starling, flying to some unknown country, over the hills and far away.

He had come home.

The ash-coloured books seemed very far away.

He stood there on the little gravelled station and he seemed to know every stone of it. His eye ran along the thick limestone wall that fringed into infinity the bay lying under the foothills, and he knew every break of it—he could almost see the velvety brown moss, the whitey-grey lichens that parterred the stones. The scent of September was in the airs, with the tang of peat, that warm intimate scent which for some reason made him think of cabins resting perilous on the edges of mountain bogs—and there, coming up to greet

him from the railway track itself, stood a foxglove, speckled and friendly, bending towards him in welcome. And then, feeling for some association, it came . . . . fairies.

Yet Finn had never seen a fairy, unless it had been within the covers of some book, nor had the tang of peat ever before crossed his mortal nostrils. Yet all these things were his own—they were the dear familiar things of a shadow-country where he had wandered and lived.

A curlew called somewhere over the flats.

Something was quartering the gravel as it scuffled towards him on a pair of heelless carpet slippers. Around its shameless trousers a frock-coat fluttered its signals of distress. Its waistcoat, a double-breasted woolly contraption, was held together by one button, half a dozen pins, and the love of God. It had a stiff dickey, fringed by something that had once been a collar—a one-piece arrangement which was both studless and collarless. That it was also tieless did not matter, as the owner had a beautiful nut-brown curling beard of his own growing up to a pair of bewilderingly blue eyes.

“Johnny the Saint, sor,” was his greeting, as he took Finn’s pride, a Gladstone bag of brown paper leather which he had bought from a gentleman in Southhampton Row who had had some difficulty with is “w’s” and “th’s.”

London was very far away. It was more distant than any city of a dream, and it came to Finn that perhaps this life of ours, sleeping and waking, was but a dream—or was it that the dreaming life was the real, and the waking, illusion? All things were possible in Ireland, where dream and reality merged.

The white limestone road that travelled so fast between the wheels of the side-car was friendly. Johnny, sitting on the other side of the jarvey, the tail of his coat hanging unconcernedly over the wheel, was friendly—friendly to Finn’s bag around which he had placed one long shirtless arm, and friendly to Finn to whom he gave warnings as needed: “Hould on tight here, sor, or ’tis your honour that might be jolted into the bosom of the Blessed Virgin . . . . there’s a hole in the road over there, but trust to Johnny the Saint . . . . the mare’ll be takin’ this corner on one wheel, ’tis the crathure’s way. . . .”

As they rattled over the grey patchings of limestone from the

station, which lay some little distance outside the town, he saw across the empty circle of the stone quay, empty save for an ancient brigantine with a weather-worn figure-head of Our Lady of the Seas stretching in disconsolate gilded bounty over the green waters, a solitary wall, standing up out of the centuries like a broken tooth, and, crouching under its foot, a square-towered abbey, looking blindly over the waste of the bay towards Carrickmore. For the first time he noticed, jutting out into the great bay, a spit of sandy peninsula, across the end of which the green tide frothed its fury as it raced towards the little grey town, leaving behind, under the lee of the spit, a miniature bay, its waters silted with the sands of the ages dyed black and gold under the setting sun.

As he was thrown out upon the stone pavement and almost into a door which stood hospitably open and leaning on one hinge in the middle of a high stone wall, the sound of a bell came stealing over the tides. Johnny, who was about to take his bag through the door, dropped it, took from his head with a sideways hooking gesture the old cap that covered the straggling brown curls that dropped around his head, and crossed himself. It was the Angelus.

To Finn himself had come an insane desire to remove his own hard hat and cross himself. A prayer almost crept from his lips as he looked at the blue eyes of Johnny the Saint staring straight before him, now filled with a moony iridescence of the spirit in which the eyes seemed to swim, detached. He looked like a Christ down at heels. Finn thought of his father.

The Reverend Cornelius O'Dempsey, P.P., with whom Father Lestrangle had arranged that he should stay, and who was filling up the door in the stone wall, was a giant of a man with a long barrel-like body set on legs of a mould that almost transcended the limits of humanity. The eyes enfolding Finn seemed to be part with the grey walls out of which they looked—the eyes of his father and Lanthorn and Mary Titterling. The nose was straight and strong as a Greek's. One long arm stretched out with a "That's all right, Johnny boy!" relieved Johnny of the bag. The hand of the other took that of Finn in its warm muscular clasp. Finn Fontaine had had heart-searchings about travelling in his former best suit and had been regretting the new clothes which

a family subscription had provided and which were packed away in the Gladstone. These heart-searchings left him as his eyes looked into those of the priest and fell upon the gold cross which hung from his black mohair watch-chain.

They were eyes with infallibility and humour and understanding in them, set in a face like a sound red apple that creased itself easily. It was at that precise moment he became conscious of a little face looking out at him from under the priest's arm. For a moment he thought it was his imagination, for all the walls seemed to be full of faces—then he saw it was a little woman with two burning shrunken eyes fastened on him, her hair, almost non-existent, yet parted natively low down on the narrow forehead.

A little critical hand came out with a weazened, doubtful "well, we'll do our best for you with the help of God," and the two little eyes bored into him.

"Ah, go along wid ye, with your cavortings and blandishments!"

Finn was startled, but the last words were not for him. For all this time, Johnny the Saint had been executing the involved set of curtsys, quartering the flagstones, lifting the cap with the broken brim repeatedly, bowing his head, and expressing, especially by his feet, the hopeless passion which had illumined and saddened his life for the previous quarter of a century, from the time when Kitty O'Halloran, now the priest's housekeeper, but then known as "Kitty the Divil," had set the town aflame with her enchantments. For this little woman, crabbed virgin that she was and tightly corsetted to her throat, the once delicate curves of chin, nose, and mouth sculptured by time into a nutcracker, had once been the beauty of Dunhallow, inflaming even mere boys, as Johnny then was, to violent emotion. Those angry shrunken eyes of nondescript colouring had once made young men, and beautiful young men at that, queer about the knees. Those feet, now encased in shapeless corny boots with the cross-slashes that brought back his father to Finn, had once been crammed into No. 3's and had had poetry written about them. Those spindle limbs, which, as Finn discovered to his shameful confusion a minute afterwards, as white-stockinged they preceded him up the stairs, were clothed in natural wool trouserings with a tendency to slipping, had sent Jim O'Grady,

one of the catches of the county, to seek four bullets from a firing squad in the revolution of a South American republic, directed, more's the pity, by a South American Irishman of the name of O'Higgins, and had troubled the confessionals with the admissions of callow youth.

Whether in the admireful or critical moments of her contemporaries, Miss O'Halloran usually hated to be called "Kitty the Divil," but there were weak moments when she would take a sort of contrary pride in it, the gleam would come back to the shrunken eye, little will o' the wisp lights would show themselves in the embittered features, and so Kitty the Divil would boast ruefully of her past misdoings—but never before Father Con, whom, in all other things, she treated as a sort of holy baby.

But she was still unmated. Kitty could never make up her mind in those days of long ago. What she had wanted, she hardly knew herself. But it was to be something in uniform—Kitty had always had an official weakness for uniforms and had once lost her heart to a member of the Royal Irish Constabulary, one of those fifty-inch chesters with a wife the other side of Belfast—but, as she said, when she found him out: "What could you expect out of the Black North?" Finally she had withered into the consolations of religion and of Father Con O'Dempsey, who informed Finn confidentially that evening, after the supper had been cleared away: "She is the only thing of which I am afraid, Mr. Fontaine—except God and the Devil—and faith!—God forgive me for saying so—I think I fear her the most, for she is the most real . . . and there's no getting round her."

From his bedroom on the upper storey of the two-floored stone house with its roofs of purple slate, Finn could just see over the high wall upon which, in summer, grew the friendly wallflowers, great velvety fellows who breathed their heavy scents across to the window, mingled with those other scents of tarry ropes and salt tides from the harbour below, or over which, in May, peered the lilac clusters, when Johnny the Saint would come round for a few to decorate the altar of our Blessed Lady. It was the only time in the year that Miss Kitty O'Halloran had a trifle of unbending for Johnny, with something of a wintry smile lighting up the dimples of her crab-apple face.



It was this which made the month of May something to be looked forward to for a whole twelve months by Johnny, who put it down to religion, although it was really the spring. But even in her most snaky moments, she always had a cup of tea for Johnny, for she herself, in her own words, "drenched her insides with tay" throughout the day and always had the little black pot on the hob: "for isn't tea a spiritual drink?" she would say.

In the shadows of evening, with Croagh Cromlech now but a blur in the heavens and the seep-seep of the waters under the old bridge the only sound, Finn looked out whilst he washed his hands and face in the strong yellow soap in the minute chiney-ware jug and basin, waiting for Father Con.

Father Lestrangle, who seemed to know everybody and to whom even Thrum himself seemed to be known in an intimate way, had given him a letter to Father Con, who had looked at him curiously for a moment after he had read it. "It seems that we still entertain angels unawares," he had said half to himself.

"You've come to solve the Irish Question," the big man had gone on. "Some think it a century old, some, seven centuries—but it is as old as time itself.

"You shall have the solution in the chapel of the Abbey to-night, or, rather, the explanation. In Ireland there is no flux in religion or politic" . . . and then he had stopped . . . "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." In it was something tremendous, *ex cathedra*. He had paused again and then went on:

"There's a gentleman named Pickles breaking chairs in London to the glory of God: let him come here and break as many chairs as he likes, he will not break the Catholic Faith—here where politics and faith are one. And yet," he added, with that queer little smile dragging at his lips, "Ireland in a sense has no faith—hers is a faith so great that it embraces all faiths—nor am I speaking of Catholicism or of Catholic dogma. She has drawn some of her greatest sons from your own church, Mr. Fontaine—Robert Emmet and Wolfe Tone and Parnell—and he was an Englishman. The best Irishmen are Englishmen," he had added whimsically as the rosy face



creased itself again. "Ireland is the house of spiritual alchemy to which all things yield and in which even the base becomes precious, just as it is the only country in the world in which the people simply don't understand non-belief.

"Nobody knows anything about us, but we have left our marks on the world—the marks of faith, impalpable but ineffaceable."

As they walked together over the bridge and along the old raised causeway that, under the rising September moon, swung its white length between the lines of black chains, inside which men moved as shadows, the priest was silent. The cottages ghosted themselves out of the massy shadows away at the other end, in a light that seemed to come from the earth itself. As they walked through the night, there came to them the creak of a pulley, the distant cry of a sailor, the "peep" of a sea bird, the laugh of a girl—a full throated chuckle like the chuckle of a blackbird that sent Finn's pulses a-beating. For one single moment, the inconsequent memory of that girl with the hair of bushy tawn flamed across his consciousness—it was just that—a flame that rushed across him and was gone.

They passed along the low stone wall skirting the harbour and the narrow channel leading to the expanse of waters outside, now black and sullen under the great orange moon, across which, as they looked, a gigantic sea fowl slowly flapped its way into the heart of the blackness. And as Finn looked, there came to him the pulsing of a bell, as bells must sound on Sabbath evenings in heaven—not full toned, not even sweet, with something of the harshness of dogma in it—but part of the night and of Ireland.

Then looming before them the jagged fang of wall, beneath it the peep of lights, oranges and blues and crimsons where the coloured panes jewelled the night, and then the square tower. The bell had hushed. They had passed inside for the incense to steal to them, and the Father had dipped his fingers in the font of holy water at the side wall and blessed himself. Some of the drops sprinkled on Finn. His hand instinctively stole up to his forehead . . . and then he remembered. He was not a Catholic. Protestants did not bless themselves.

Out of the twilight, with the solitary starlight burning up there before the Lord made flesh, came the murmur of voices.

It rose and fell, swelled and died away in a sort of aspiring chaunt. On the altar, lights were moving.

Finn found himself in the melting pot of Ireland—in that “house of spiritual alchemy.” On his knees beside the priest he let his soul wander out through the shadowy roof up to the firmament of star and velvet above—out through the darkness with the seabird—out over the face of the waters into the heart of infinity.

As they walked back, the words of Father Con came again, and yet again, to his memory: “The same, yesterday, to-day and forever . . . and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” . . . and the gates of hell. . . .

As he climbed into his feather bed that night, with the words of Johnny the Saint still in his ears: “And may the heavens be your bed this night!” it was to find himself in a new but a very old world. He could hear the tide rushing under the bridge . . . swoosh . . . swoosh . . . the place where dreams come true.

Ireland.

## XI

### THE LAND OF SHADOWS

When Finn had been a month in Ireland, he received two letters—one, in the stilted handwriting of his mother with a certain unsuspected insubordination in the capitals, the other, in the upright painted characters of his Aunt Bella with something uncompromising about them in a Chinese way.

The former was interesting in the way that a patchwork quilt is interesting and was not without that literary touch which had made Mrs. Fontaine the shining light of the Forestford Church Mutual Improvement Society, at the discussions of which she read short introductory papers upon such wildly interesting subjects as "Why I am Church"; "Is Cleanliness next to Godliness?" and so on.

From it he learned that his father, faced by a combination of MacGlusky, short weight, slack and religion, had been driven more deeply into the soap trade. He had managed to sell half a ton of "Beauty" to an eccentric spinster, a tall rank creature who with her smirk and iron-grey curls inhabited a lonely house on the borders of Epping Forest, overlooking the vast dormitory of Walthamstow, who had asked him for one hundred enlargements of her photograph.

It seemed that Jemmy had booked the order, in his excitement falling over the glazed bag into the hall, and had had the photo enlargements delivered by a special van, accompanied by himself, and on the road, the road to fortune, allowed his mind to play lightly around the airy castles which, by the time he had reached the house, had assumed precipitous dimensions. Upon, however, trying to deliver the soap and collect the money, the eccentric spinster had professed complete ignorance of him and his soap, there had been a lamentable scene, and finally she had set the dog on him with unfortunate results to Jemmy's trousers and nerves.

Then he discovered that what he had taken to be eccen-

tricity was just lunacy, although the lady had not been so mad that she had not held on to a dozen of the enlargements, for which he himself had been forced to pay.

All this had had a very depressing effect on him, and they would have been in a bad way at Ash Villa had it not been for Mr. Buldger Spellbind and the Happy Homes of England, Limited. From what his mother wrote, it appeared that his father had "done a deal" in some of the shares, which he had bought. She called it "investment" two lines further down, regretting her plunge into technicalities. He had "come in low and cleared out high," which, from what Mrs. Fontaine said, was the whole art of investment.

It seemed that the Happy Homes was a golden adventure in bricks and mortar, of which that little man Spellbind, whose photograph was constantly appearing in the papers, was the pillar, as well as a pillar of the Wesleyan Methodist church in the suburb where he lived. Finn remembered him from the illustrateds. A bulging foreheaded little frockcoated man with an enormous top hat that endeavoured vainly to get on terms with the coping of his forehead, who was always referred to as "a pillar" of this or that and who was always springing new schemes, involving millions. As he said himself: "I can't think in thousands. Don't know how." He was the pet of tens of thousands of little investors, many of them drawn from the nonconformist chapels, who followed him blindly in all his schemes and who, to give them their due, had in the mass no more idea that the Happy Homes were really the ugliest slum wilderness in London, inhabited partly by women of the streets and partly by the criminal classes, from much of which the landlord could only collect his rents through the medium of "key-men," themselves denizens and usually criminals, than they had of the prize-ring and the theatre against which they fulminated.

Ström, the lodger, had been giving more trouble at Ash Villa with "his foreign fads and notions." His particular God needed a vegetarian diet for his understanding and digestion, and it seemed that Mrs. Fontaine had been having what she called "a tiff" with him upon the subject of suet in pie-crusts. He had also begun to display an inconvenient habit of lying about clothed in nothing but his rectitude. He called it "taking a sun-bath" . . . and then Mrs. Fon-

taine had been silent with a discretion horribly suggestive. His Aunt Bella had however supplemented with one of her bitter-sweet explanations from which it appeared that it would not really have mattered had it, not been that "one of the friends opposite," a maiden lady of no uncertain years, had discovered that by standing tiptoe on two books laid upon her table, she was enabled to glimpse the holy man literally *in puris naturalibus*, and had complained strongly to the neighbourhood.

The Latin and the malignant black characters brought back to Finn that erratic but unsubduable Cuthey tendency to writing and the still-born MS. commenced by his Aunt Bella in youth and never finished. It was to have been called "Our Village" and was a caustic analysis, freely barbed by Latin quotations, of the little Nottinghamshire village where she had lived the first twenty-four years of her life. But it had never reached fruition and had been abandoned with some lavender scented letters in a drawer where Finn's enquiring nose, poking where it had no business to poke, had found it. This had happened when Bella Cuthey, after the accident to her face which had spoiled her beauty, had "got religion" and renounced the devil and all his works, amongst which were presumably the manuscript and the letters.

The only gleam in his mother's letter was the story that Mr. Paris Asthar had been flaunting it in Regent Street in a pleated frock-coat that had caused a sensation and a bitter schism in the young men about town. This, Mrs. Fontaine told with a certain satisfaction, referring to Asthar as "your friend." It was the Cuthey weakness for the aristocracy. In a weak moment, Finn had mentioned the Thrum interview and Mr. Asthar's invitation.

The letter finished upon a note of condolence at his situation "amongst those Irish heathen in that place with the outlandish name," much as though Dunhallow or Black Rock were Crusoe's Island, which brought Finn back to reality. For all those things of London seemed remote here in Ireland. They had nothing to do either with him or with living.

He was still gathering facts for his Irish articles and already there had commenced in him the first outpost affair of a battle between ethic and ambition. For he had received a letter from "The Earth," saying they wished him to give special

attention to the irreconcilable differences between Catholic and Protestant in Ireland. However hazily, he felt in it an indication as to how he was to write. But Finn Fontaine was of the sort that hates "indication." He wanted to be free.

Ever since he had landed in Dunhallow, he had been trying to divide Ireland into Catholics and Protestants, Home Rulers and Unionists. He found Ireland incapable of division. He had tried to make that hitherto infallible division of people into "propagandists" and "indifferents," the division he had made at the Tabernacle meeting and had been making ever since he could think. But here, in the land where belief was always at white heat and where matter was dominated by spirit, there was no propaganda. In all his month he had not been able to find any attempt by Catholic to convert Protestant, or by Protestant to convert Catholic, and so far as politics were concerned, here in the South at any rate there was no attempt at proselytisation. In Ireland one instinctively thought of politic and religion, that is the religion which lies behind dogma, as one and the same. As for the people of the ash-covered books, it never occurred to either Protestant or Catholic that they existed. The nearest he ever got to an Irishman's consciousness of the existence of such people was one day when Father Con, who had been reading an article in "The Tablet" upon the decay of faith and morals throughout Europe, said: "Some day the Almighty God will get mad and there will be a great war . . . or something."

It seemed to him that every Irishman he had met, irrespective of his particular dogma, was so entirely assured of the efficacy and assuredness, not of *his* religion, but of *religion*, as the only thing in the world that mattered, that it never entered into his mind "to take it out of the hands of God," as they phrased it. Ireland was the end of faith, not of faiths. Ireland was one whole.

In his attempts to find out what was this faith that was of Ireland, he had discovered that not only was there no propaganda, but no jealousy. Father Con, a fervent Catholic, himself spoke well of the little body of local Methodists who met in a handbox over a stable. "A stable is a good place," he said, "sure wasn't our Blessed Lord born in one?" They were shepherded by Sam Sligo, a tub-bodied man with puny arms and a voice like a rasp, whose nose snubbed itself out



of an undergrowth of whisker. In some unexplained way he reminded Finn of a picture he had once seen of Karl Marx, the founder of economic Socialism. He found in him, in the moments of his more fervent bellowings, which he made in good dissenting fashion with one knee on a chair, as a protest against two-kneed Papistry, an entire belief that the Lord prospers the godly man, a belief which he shared both with John L. Crux and with Finn's father, although, like them also, the next moment he would commit himself devoutly to the statement that "him that the Lord loveth, he chasteneth." He found here, as so often before, a sort of unity of faith; a philosophy; a synthesis; which seemed to unite the most differentiate. It was a unity of human beings that was always discovering itself, and against all reason and even conviction.

He also was a hell-fire man, but of another type to the General and Billy Pickles, for he took the damned, that is to say, the Catholics, pretty easy, all things considering . . . perhaps because anyhow they were sure to go to hell in the fullness of time. In this world at any rate they were his best customers and very good friends.

He was a draper in the main street and prospered before the Lord, wherefore he rejoiced exceedingly on Sundays, and always through his little snub nose. Like his congregation and his friends the Catholics in the chapel across the road, one of the three Catholic chapels of the town, he was entirely assured of his own immortality and was of a consciousness exceedingly defined.

But though there was peace between Protestant and Catholic, there was no peace between Protestant and Protestant. There was the Reverend Dick Despard, "Don't-care-a-damn-Dick," as he was affectionately known by the Catholics. This easy-going lovable clergyman of the Church of Ireland, with his ragged beard and moustache, rolling eye and rakish billycock hat set at a most unclerical angle on the side of his reverend pate, had, Finn discovered by accident more than anything else, for no one thought anything about it, been caught apportioning the church funds to his own very real necessities, which included a small wife and thirteen large children. (There had been an item of paint for some gates that had never been painted and there were other things—collection shortages, etc.) But he was beloved of the

"Papists." He was shamefully underpaid "and who would be after blaming the honest man?" said the Catholics who had a lenient eye for this sort of thing when it concerned the rival church.

The children of Dunhallow loved him and his bulls-eyes—a powerful peppermint concoction and unfailing preventive of "wind," and his pennies (possibly purloined from sacramental sources), and his popularity often caused theological perturbations in the mind of Catholic youth which had been taught to uncover to the priests of God and to none other. Despite his tendency to "appropriation" and "a dhrop of the crathure" in canonical moments (he had a habit of retiring during the singing of the first hymn), which, unlike his enemy, the Reverend MacDougal, unfortunately went to his head and not to his stomach, there was hardly a woman in the place that did not give him the ecclesiastical "bob" nor a child that didn't take off its hat—when it had one.

But he was faced by a splitting half of a congregation, shocked at his shortcomings and the leniency of a good-natured Bishop, who were ministered to by the above-mentioned Reverend Jock MacDougal, known locally as "the Reverend Mac," a raw-boned broad-shouldered Antrim Scotsman with a raw-boned voice, in a little upper chamber hung in red like a sacrificial altar that matched the red whiskers and face of this Presbyterian priest, who when he preached seemed to carry a claymore in his hand. He was the only Protestant there that Finn had met who seemed to feel that the Catholics were other than one flesh with their heretic brethren. But, as the Reverend Dick himself had said to Finn in easy, sleepy good-nature, his hands deep in his cross-pockets, his billycock over one eye: "What can you expect, Mr. Fontaine, out of the Black North?" But that was an expression he often heard from other lips and especially from Miss Kitty O'Halloran, with whom he was now on terms of crabbed friendship.

Not that this by any means exhausted the sects. There was a rumour that the local Inspector of the Royal Irish Constabulary, a perfect giant of a man with a back like a tombstone, had some wonderful back-parlour faith of his own which he kept entirely to himself, to his tiny nonentity of a wife, who spent her time in producing children, mostly in bunches,

for she had a tendency to twins, and to the children themselves. Nobody knew what that faith was, but no one had ever seen them inside any of the orthodox places of worship.

And finally, there was old Groyle, the black-faced atheist, locally known in derisive friendliness as the *begaun* man, because of his dealing in eggs, to which he added blackberries and mushrooms, in the season. However, when Finn went to him to absorb local information for Crux upon the blackberry and mushroom possibilities of Dunhallow, and, knowing his local reputation, began to sound him upon the ash-covered books, he found out that his antipathy to religion was not to religion in the abstract but in the concrete. It seemed it was he who had led the secession from the Reverend Dick, but had afterwards quarrelled with the Reverend Mac upon certain knotty questions of dogma. He had tried to lead a second secession, but, having failed, had gone into the outer agnostic darkness. It was anyhow obvious that he called himself an atheist more from devilry than conviction.

One by one Finn's ideas and his prejudices, political, religious, social, had been going in "the house of spiritual alchemy."

It was after this last interview that he had gone out to Black Rock on a jaunting car with Johnny the Saint as Jehu, to inspect the fishing possibilities for Crux, who was always firing telegrams at him to keep him up to the mark. He needed it. He was apt to let everything go in the soft south-west wind and rain of Ireland.

They drove out to Black Rock, along the side of the hills that fringed with mossy green the right of the bay, in the beautiful September morning. The road winding up and down the length of the hills in its white loneliness, ran between their wheels until they came almost to frowning Carrickmore itself, after which they dropped down by easy stages to the little mushroom village nestling beneath. Above them, perching perilous on the very edge of the precipice, clung a little grey stone chapel, one end fallen into ruins, looking bleakly out across the wastes of the Atlantic towards the harbours of heaven. To Finn it seemed that in it lived the soul of the place, over which it watched in tender austerity.

In his pocket he had an introduction from Father Con to Father Joseph Hennessey, the parish priest of Black Rock.

"For," said Father Con, "to try and storm Black Rock without first getting round Father Hennessey, who is an enemy of me own, is the same thing as to storm heaven without going through purgatory." To Finn's enquiring look, he had gone on: "'Tis like this, Finn boy"—(for they had got to that stage)—"I believe in fairies, though maybe it's against me religion—there's a lot of pagan in the Irishman—but now, there's Father Hennessey, he doesn't believe in them—he hates them:" he said it in wistful savagery. "And there ye have the head and the tail of it."

Finn began to think on this cryptic pronouncement after he had followed the directions of a Hercules enswathed in a blue sweater, a three days' growth of iron-grey stubble on his face and with the keen blue eye that comes from salt water and hard weather. "'Tis up there, yer honour." One great arm had pointed up the hill.

He walked through the one and only street of the village, for he was going where a horse could not follow, and he had left Johnny the Saint with his animal at the little public house where they had been both pounced upon by the proprietor, a little yellow-bearded griping man with a nose half-way between a hawk and a parrot and a pair of burning brown eyes. As he walked between the whitewashed cabins with the thatched roofs, the women, some of them, the older ones, with pipes in their mouths, which, in courtesy to the stranger, they smoked under the lee of their aprons, continued to carry on their conversation in the Irish which was the language of the place, though some of the "Turks" "had a little English" for use in the dwellings of civilisation, such as Dunhallow, where they went in their hookers to sell their fish, and some of the younger ones spoke it quite well. He felt the delicate consideration of these mothers and wives of the giants who lounged over the half doors of the cabins who did not let the silence come that would have told him they were watching the stranger.

He caught a stray *maidin bragh* or "modd'n-bedaw" as it sounded to him, which he was to know was the Irish "Good-morning!" and found as he advanced that he was preceded by a light cavalry of boys or girls, he could not tell which, for many that looked like boys were dressed in petticoats, who, long-legged, bright-eyed and keen-faced, fled before him, the

bare legs skirmishing under his eyes into the doorways, displacing the slumbrous pigs which, with the fowls, had the free run of the houses. The blue smoke from the cabins seemed to blend with the bluer air and drove down a little into the narrow way, carrying that tang of peat which from the day at Dunhallow station had become for him the scent of Ireland. Up aloft a great sea fowl slid down the wind which had begun to call to him over that booming of waters of which he was now, as he came up to the higher ground, for the first time aware. Below him, the rocks ran black and sullen back towards Dunhallow in one unbroken line far as the eye could follow under the shallow green waters of this iron coast, save in one place, directly beneath, where the iron was broken by a submarine cleft of a deep dark green that made into a little circle of deep water at the coast end of which he saw the life-boat shed. Beyond it, curtseying like ducks upon the long heaving swell outside in the open sea, a dozen half-decked boats at anchor, clumsy bluff-bowed affairs which foreshortened neck-like masts, at the head of each mast a pulley like the head of a fowl, which, for all their clumsiness, seemed instinct with life and rode the swells easily and dry.

The priest's house lay on the top of the rise commanding the village. It was a square house built of grey limestone and roofed with slate. To Finn it looked a stronghold of the faith, but it had an air of stark comfort. About it, pecked a small mob of hens and cocks whilst a dozen ducks paddled in the weed of the stream that ran past it.

As he walked up the steps, the smell of bacon and eggs with a more indistinct smell of whisky, which he first thought was peat, met his nostrils. He was shown by a little house-keeper, who was almost a duplicate of Kitty, into a hard horse-hair parlour of shiny chairs and a sofa, with a miniature book-case filled with volumes that looked as if they had never been read, the whole of a bareness that brought back for a moment Father Lestrangle's room at the Seminary.

"Is that the sort of thing ye're bringing to his riverence, I ask? Ah! Take it away and bring him another. De ye think I'd be insultin' a holy man like the Father with that thing of bone and feather? that . . ."

The voice came piercing to his ears. He looked out of the window and saw a wretched, dejected-looking woman, her face



downcast under the shawl that had fallen back upon her thin neck, taking back from a hand that showed itself across the edge of the window a miserable looking chicken. It was her offering to the Godhead, the widow's mite, but it had been refused.

In the passage he heard a puffing and blowing, and then the door burst open, disclosing an apoplectic round face with some scant grey hair on the head, all set upon that gargantuan body which he had begun to associate with Irish theology. The whole was clothed in a priest's coat, covered with ancient snuffings and gravings.

"Ah, good mornin', Mr. Fintaine," said the big-faced man. "Ye're from England, I hear." There was a hurricane note in the voice, a note of bluster that was almost a threat. It was not what he said, but the way he said it.

Finn remembered the chicken and began to understand Father Con's explanation about the fairies. But it took him that interview and many others that were to follow to discover that Father Joseph Hennessey was one of those tyrannic, loud-voiced, bullying, whisky-drinking prelates who are fortunately rare in Ireland. He was the tyrant of the village, which feared him as the vicar of God on earth.

Finn explained the object of his visit, to which the priest listened with heavy indifference, until he said: "Mr. Crux is anxious to bring some money into Black Rock."

At the word "money" a little light came into the two small grey eyes. The body took on an aggressive interested corpulence. The veins in the thickened temples swelled.

"Ah," said his reverence, "now you're talkin'."

"You're a heretic, Mr. Fintaine, Father O'Dempsey tells me." (He always pronounced Finn's name in that way.) "But ye see the House of God, the house of the one and true church," he said it pugnaciously, "up there on the hill. Sure, 'tis the shame that we can't put in a coloured window behind the altar. Sure isn't it that that's a disgrace to civilised people? Bring the money into Black Rock that'll decorate the House of God, and I'm your friend.

"We'll be havin' a glass of whisky on the strength of it," he added after a moment, and looked as nearly shocked as a man of his habit could when he learned from Finn's bash-



ful lips that he was a teetotaler. For Finn's father and mother had brought him up in a holy fear of alcohol.

"Well I'll have wan myself," he said as he leant down to some little recess under the bookcase, from which he took a bottle of what he said "never paid the Queen sixpence" and drank a pretty stiff tumbler neat, and then another. After which he took up the matter of the fishing with Finn.

"There's a good friend of mine, and of the church, down there—a man named Higgins. He owns a public house and the people call him the *gombeen* man, for he lends a trifle of money now and then to oblige his neighbours. We must talk to him about it." The little eyes measured Finn a moment, and then added, dryly: "I expect he'll be wantin' a finger in the pie. Make him your friend, Mr. Fintaine, if you take my tip." He smiled slyly.

There was venality, cupidity, cunning, in that smile. It was the same man who a moment before had been talking about decorating the House of God, the little chapel up there on the edge of the cliff. And talking earnestly, as Finn saw. It was a new view upon the faith of Ireland.

Finn found that he could no more divide Ireland into sheep and goats than into Protestants and Catholics. The thing that twined itself in and about all was religion, and that religion Catholicism.

Although they did not know it, Sam Sligo, the Reverend Dick, even that monk-like inspector of the Royal Irish Constabulary, all these people and their congregations were Catholic. Only one of two things were possible in Ireland—either Paganism or the Catholicism which had displaced it. Ireland was Catholic. She was the Land of Shadows and of Faith.

## XII

### IMPERIAL DOGMA

Finn returned to London to find it meaningless. He was returning nominally to report to Crux, but actually to find out why articles on Ireland had not been appearing in "The Earth," which he had seen every day. Each morning he had opened his paper with that anticipatory pringling in feet and solar plexus, a pringling to be followed by the sinking at the pit of the stomach in the heavy leaded silence of the columns. And so he would turn from his breakfast with loathing. Finn's eating was much affected by his emotions.

There had been articles by Billy Pickles and the General, which had resulted in a solemn fulmination by Professor Dust about the revival of superstition. Matters had been still further complicated by something that had shocked the scientific world—the incursion of the very distinguished physicist, Sir Raymond Hilary, into the debate, as he said, "on the side of the angels," when he had disgusted his scientific brethren by his defence of miracles, whereas, as Sir Lancaster Hogge, who had rushed in head down, pointed out in high snorting phrases, there were only the miracles of science.

It was into this mêlée that the Bishop of Whitechapel had poked his benevolent but bewildered head, losing a good deal of wool, both to Sir Raymond and Sir Lancaster, in the process—the former gently patronising to "old-fashioned conceptions," the latter, savage, and worrying the old gentleman bulldog fashion before being called off by the editor himself, who closed the correspondence, but not before somebody, who signed himself "Lucifer," and whom Finn suspected to be Paris Asthar, had got in amongst the lot of them, and, literally, raised the very devil.

Jock McAdam, the Socialist fanatic, whom Lestrangle had once called "the spiritual leader of the Social Democracy," and who himself was a deeply religious man, had also joined in,

probably for ulterior purposes, for he was the most persistent propagandist in England. He wrote well enough, but had obviously no business in that galley, and his pungent periods about Internationalism as the new world-religion seemed to Finn far-fetched and remote. They had nothing to do with reality, although MacAdam and his gospel seemed real enough to many. When, however, he asked himself what reality was? he could only reply "Ireland," which was, of course, ridiculous.

As he got into the Forestford train at Liverpool Street, he saw Mr. Titterling on the platform saying good-bye to a pretty young woman who was about to become a mother. Despite the cheerless November day, he looked very well dressed indeed in a close-fitting coat of blue Melton, eyeglass and shiny topper. Finn knew the signs. He was obviously after "a good day," and, as a matter of fact had been "pigeon-plucking" in a Shaftesbury Avenue billiard saloon where he had lost two games at moderate stakes to what he called "a gilded mug," and had won the third at £50 a side.

He was so earnestly engaged with the young woman, who seemed to be tearfully expostulating, that he did not see Finn, who, from his corner, saw the girl attempt to kiss him as the train moved out and the man, who had been scanning her through his monocle with an air of good-natured despair, drew back.

The impression it had made on him quickly passed when he reached Ash Villa to find the Fontaine affairs desperate, his mother in tears, his little grandmother in praise and prayer in her bedroom, and his father dumb before the Lord. Aunt Judy, after giving Finn one of those rare smiles of hers, which so transformed her ugliness, for they were very fond of each other, sat in the background, resting her nose against the pattern of the wallpaper.

The coal trade had been going from bad to much worse, the MacGlusky becoming tougher as he became more religious, a combination regarded by his father in admiring confusion. The slack had increased and the weight decreased. Some of the customers had become mutinous, others blasphemous. The door had been banged in his face the length of a road, and one man had even threatened "to take the law into his own hands," whatever that might mean. "I am a 'ornery cuss," he had said, "when I'm roused. *Now* I'm roused." He had

begun to remove his coat to Jemmy's dismayed astonishment, and he, the bag, and the notebook had been forced into strategic retreat.

And all this was being complicated by his boots, now disintegrating.

He had been spending his days in running backwards and forwards to the coal depot, trying to make things right, and had been received by the terrible MacGlusky with contumely and invidious comparisons with a smart young fellow who, with the advantage of not possessing a conscience, had just come on. When he had timidly asked his tyrant how he could reconcile short weight with religion, that gentleman had taken refuge in blasphemous metaphysics.

Finally, Finn heard, as a sort of addendum, that his father had been "investing" in gold. It was one of the Spellbind companies.

There was something in the grey eyes of his father, now venous and glassy, that reminded him of a rabbit he had once seen chased by dogs. He was scared. His beard was straggling and grey and his head seemed to have shrunk.

Whilst his mother was in the midst of this recital, before which his father sat, dumbly, they heard a voice in the hall which voluntarily brought to Finn the bull of Bashan.

It had been said of his uncle Robert, his father's brother, that he was the most offensively healthy man in London. It was certain at least that Robert Fountain, or Bobs, as he was usually known, had a most depressing effect upon the sick and ailing, whom he made to feel as worms. Bobs Fountain was a fresh-air fiend, who worshipped a triune deity of water, onions and nuts. For all his sixty-five years, he thought nothing of walking the twenty miles to Forestford on a Sunday morning from his rooms in Muswell Hill, lying on his back in the garden to absorb anything that might be going whether of sun or rain (he was cold-proof, as shock-proof), eating a score of onions out of the little bag that was his invariable accompaniment, and then walking back in the evening. They heard him now in the passage:

"Nuts, my boy! Nuts! Concentrated sunshine. That's your mark!" He filled the passage with his roarings.

His voice came in a Jovian blast, which blew open the door of the little back sitting room to admit a remarkably vivid

gentleman of fresh complexion and snowy hair, which sprouted from scalp, brow, ear and nostril. Behind him, like a bird of ill-omen, stalked Aunt Bella.

"Jemmy, old cock, buck up! Just blew in to wish you luck."

He advanced upon his downcast brother, whom he hit in the small of the back with a hand like a piece of gnarled teak.

"Bella here has told me all about it. Never say die till you're fly-blown." He bore down upon his shrinking sister-in-law, who hated him as the plague, but who met his smacking salute with a perfunctory peck.

"I've been telling Robert, Fanny, all about it," explained Aunt Bella. Finn knew that explanation. A thing of hints and malignant suppression.

"We must bear what the Lord sends us," she went on in pious aspiration. She looked on Jemmy with savage commiseration.

"But this is what comes from wobbling. The Lord hates a wobbler. Even worse than he hates the unbeliever." She darted a glance at Uncle Bobs, who was quite unmoved.

"Nonsense," said that gentleman. "Nothing of the kind, Bella. Haven't been in a church for thirty years, except the great Church of Nature" (he always spoke in capitals) "and look at this." He took Aunt Bella's black-gloved hand and holding the first and second fingers stiffly between his own darted them into the middle of his thigh, to that lady's astonished indignation. "Nuts, old girl, nuts. And fresh air!"

"Cheer up, old son, you'll soon be dead, and when you're dead, well you *are* dead." Uncle Bobs had no doubts about mortality, but his mortality was as nearly immortal as anything earthly could be. It was his universal panacea for anyone in really low health to tell him that his sufferings would soon be over, in a jovial rationalist voice.

"Judy, my jewel, my light o' love!" (Uncle Bobs had the occasional lapses of a life that had been freely natural), "how goes it? Still in the doldrums? Won't you give us a kiss?" It was Uncle Bobs' affectionate plural.

He skipped over to her, but Aunt Judy, her nose still resting against the wall, turned her goat-like eyes to smile a little at her irrepressible brother-in-law, whom, though no-

body knew it, she had once loved in secret. Aunt Judy had a tendency to secret loves. But they remained secret.

At all this, Finn's mother stared in a sort of coma. There she sat, fixing her hated brother-in-law, Medusa-like.

Finn knew the atmosphere. Since Ireland, it was unbearable. He wanted to escape from it as from a prison. He sneaked out of the room, caught his hat off the hatstand, and walked over to the Titterlings, as he always did when he was in trouble. Mrs. Titterling, in her way, which took something of its comfort from the smoothly parted hair over the grey eyes, acted as a sort of balm to him, and little Mary as something else—he could not say what. But he loved to speak with her.

The door was opened by Mr. Titterling, a subdued Titterling and quite other than the Titterling of Liverpool Street, although he was still in patent leathers. His face looked as though he had been fighting with sweeps, and the high glossy collar was streaked, from which Finn gathered that he had "run short of "baccy" and had been skirmishing in the grate for stumps. One dirty forefinger was placed upon the weak mouth.

"They're here," he said dolefully, and let him in.

There came the drone of voices from the little back drawing room, into which Finn was shown, to find two theologically constipated elders. They looked extraordinarily alike, although they really were not related, as they rose in their dark nankeen-blue frock-coats, quartered by large plaited horse-hair buttons, with their white hair parted in precisely the same place on the right, the hair falling over the left eye, and their long shaven upper lips and fringe of grey beard, with the strong, rather cruel noses with the deep pits on each side.

They were introduced by Mrs. Titterling as Elder Parkinson and Elder Tomkins, and then they sat down.

In his hand he found that of Mary, who had been waiting her chance. She snuggled close to him, drawing down his head to kiss. The elders dropped their eyes. Mr. Titterling sat in the corner, rather like a naughty boy who has been caught in the act, muttering to himself unutterable things. The room stank intolerably of tobacco.

Mr. Titterling was badly frightened. Before Finn's en-



trance, the two elders had been talking about hell, with special reference to backsliders, and the only thing which prevented another instantaneous conversion of Mr. Titterling was the feel of the twenty crisp £5 notes in his inside pocket, which he had won that morning. "I'm damned if I don't think a £5 note will yet stand between me and salvation," he was saying to himself.

"... hell," one of the elders was saying. "Can we imagine what that simple word means? Eternity. Can we imagine what that means? And then hell through eternity? It is an awful thought. If each blade of grass on the earth represented a million of years, and one added them all together, that would not be eternity. If each grain of sand were a million of years, that would not be eternity. If each molecule of each grain were the millions of millions of years represented by all the grains of sand of the world, that would still not even be the shadow of eternity. If the time represented by all these molecules were multiplied by a million times a million and the result multiplied by itself each second since time first was to the end of the world, even that would not be eternity. And through all these æons of time, unmeasurable by man, never ending, must the sinner sit in the flames that are never quenched, that burn as no mortal fire burns, for ever and for ever looking across the chasm of the pit to the faithful Elect sitting in the bosom of the Eternal, safe for ever."

The gentleman, who appeared to have concentrated upon his subject, glanced from time to time at the man in the corner, who several times, especially when the grains of sand began to multiply, nearly broke down, only being saved from grace by the crispness of the Bank of England notes which he felt himself compelled to press. They crackled a little in the stillness that followed.

Mrs. Titterling looked like a tear-stained Madonna as she sat in her little chair and thought of the impending eternal separation from the man whom she loved. For all its mildness, there was something of desperation and rebellion in the eye.

But little Mary was not horror stricken. She listened with all her eyes. Before even the most terrible arithmetic, the

little mouth set itself and the eyes looked out calmly. In the stillness the little voice came:

"That means that everybody in the whole world except the Spirit's Elect are going to be damned, doesn't it?" The father looked up with a gleam of hope. He had a curious confidence in his eldest.

"Yes," said the elder, dourly.

"That means that if father dies now and Finn here, who is my friend, mother and I would be up there," (she looked vaguely at the ceiling), "with God, and father down there" (she looked at the floor as though she could see into the pit). "And that however much mother and I tried to help father it would be no use. God wouldn't listen. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," came again.

"Then I don't believe in Him."

The tiny voice sounded with dreadful distinctness in the little room, as Finn's own had once sounded that day of Father Lestrangle's visit to Ash Villa. One of the elders had risen in horror, his large white hands upraised. Her mother stared at her with parted lips. But the gleam of hope lighted itself more strongly in the father's eye.

"Oh! Mary! Mary!" said her mother. It was enough.

"I can't believe in a God, mama, who can never hear prayer whether in this world or the next." She stood up, her little hands clenched behind her back. "I can't. Do you think you or I could be happy to see father screaming in the flames of hell and we safe? I'd rather be with father."

Finn had no clear recollection of what happened after that. There was a confusion of shocked elder, tearful Mrs. Titterling, a rescussitated Mr. Titterling with monocle, and a defiant Mary, sent to bed, but not before she had time to whisper: "What is the Irish God, Finn? Is he the same as the God of the Spirit's Elect?" And when Finn, out of the fulness of his heart and experience, could tell her that the God of the Irish was a merciful God, even to heretics who knew no better, and, on the whole, a just God, she went to bed with a happy smile and to sleep in happy dreaming.

The next thing he remembered was finding himself at tea in the kitchen opposite the two elders, who, to Finn's indignation—he only managed to secure two and a tail—consumed quantities of sardines washed down by buckets of tea—sar-

dines paid for by "gilded mugs" of the racecourse and billiard saloon.

From where Finn sat with Mr. Titterling hanging over the kitchen fender, he heard the elders making a frightful drone and denunciation before the Lord from the little drawing room. Once, he thought, he heard the name of Aunt Judy, but that might have been imagination. Mr. Titterling, despite the last ten minutes, was still in a shaken condition and trembled as the hymns of a strange bitter-sweetness came along the passage. And even to Finn there was something terrifying in those tunes of the minor with the words that accompanied them. "Damned if I can call my soul my own," said the wretched man, ruefully—the man who had just told Finn: "I won a monkey on old Do-be-Quick."

The full sweet touch of Mrs. Titterling in the contralto that hung under the menace of the bass came to him where he sat, and then the words of the hymn he had heard so often there:

But oh! the avenging fires of hell  
That choke and scorch and writhe,  
    Whilst in the midst  
    The sinner sits  
In torment—yet alive!

When he got home he found a letter from Asthar on the shelf of the hatstand inviting him to "The Cloisters" on Friday, following his original invitation that day in Thrum's room. "You seem to have interested the great man," he said, in that kindly comforting way of his. "He actually condescended to remember that you were back from Ireland—the country I love so much because I have never been in it."

Finn's heart beat tumultuous. For a moment he thought it was because the hair of Deirdre Asthar had brushed itself across the page he was reading—then he found it was Thrum. So he *was* interested in the articles. Ambition, which in Ireland had seemed so far away, was gripping him here in London. And to-morrow he was to see Thrum. He had written for an appointment.

On the next day he found Thrum with his back to a roaring fire, the usual long black cigar in his white teeth, and that white lock of hair lying dankly across his forehead.

"Well?" said Thrum. That unsmiling monosyllable had dis-

composed many mighty ones in its time. It should have annihilated the ungainly, nervous-looking boy on the other side of the room, but it did not. It only made him savage and fearless.

"I have come, Sir, to ask why you haven't printed my Irish articles?" It was not an enquiry. It was a challenge.

The man before him seemed to relax a trifle. He was an unsmiling man, was the great newspaper proprietor, but something that might have been the ghost of a twinkle trembled in the eye of hard indifference and flickered out.

"Because they are not what I want," he said, simply. "You have not been loyal."

"What do you mean, Sir? I have written as well as I was able. I have written what I believe to be true. I have been loyal to my beliefs."

"Loyalty to your paper is as necessary as loyalty to your God," went on the big man, as though he had not spoken. He looked steadfastly at the end of the fine grey ash. "And 'The Earth' doesn't want poetry or fine writing," he added, absently.

"'The Earth' is the Englishman's Bible, just as the earth itself is the Englishman's. I have to be as careful what I give to my congregation as the other Holy Father." That twinkle came again, trembled frostily and vanished. "The truth is revealed only to the few. They must be careful how they give it out, for few can bear it. Fleet street has also its *index expurgatorius*." And now the man before him had ceased to twinkle. He was speaking in dead earnest, as Finn could see, with a jaw that brought back that of Crux. There was something compressed, suppressed, about his utterance as of power held in leash, banking up. "Not a word, not a comma, goes into 'The Earth' that is not considered for a congregation that extends throughout the world. Ours is the power. We have the world to consider. That is why we speak to the world by suggestion and by suppression, as the masters of men have always spoken." Father Lestrangle had once said something to him like that, that day in the bare white-washed study at the Seminary.

And so it was that Finn Fontaine found himself in the roar of Fleet street with confused memory of an extraordinary half hour—one of those queer uncontrollable bursts of confidence

for which the newspaper king was noted. Was it true that he had dared to ask that man back there why he did not print the truth? That he had asked him how he applied his faith to the workaday world? Whether there was to be one law for the masters and another for the people?

And there came to him the solitary lapse into a rare, indulgent humour of a man who had never been spoken to like that before, which had shown itself in a veiled explanation, a perfect dovetailing of ideas, the flawless mosaic of his faith in Power, but made as much to himself as to his auditor. At last, his division of the world into the Powerful and the Powerless. And there had come to him again, even up there in his room, that queer contradiction of the words of the grown-ups and their actions. Yet he knew that this man was genuine. His power-faith was as real to him as Father Con's Roman Catholicism or Mrs. Titterling's Spirit's Elect.

And so he had gone out of the room humbled, but unsubdued.

For it came to him in a flash of consciousness that he was in eruption against society. He had begun to think of himself as an artist. He had thought dimly that art was to be a sort of saviour, but, although he did not put it into words, an art informed by passion. And here was Thrum and his "Earth." What was the artist to them? Only something to be used in gathering power, and, after use, thrown into a waste paper basket as a housewife throws refuse into a dustbin. That was it. The appalling indifference not only to the fine writing that Thrum had mentioned, but to any of the fine things of life. The indifference to life itself. And then, the contemptuous waste of human talent and force.

His father and mother had often spoken of "that great and good Mr. Thrum" and their dominion was not quite shaken.

And then he recalled, vaguely, incredibly, that he had said something of this indifference, boyish and awkward, to Thrum, and that Thrum had looked at him a moment—he would have said something not unadmiring in the look had it not seemed like nonsense—and had said: "The day you change your mind, come to me, and I will put you on a high horse . . . for beggars sometimes ride in Fleet Street . . . but you come on my terms, not on yours."

He was roused from his reverie by somebody speaking to him. It was Lanthorn. He took the boy by the coat sleeve and said to him excitedly, but in quiet triumph in those short jerky sentences which he so often used when interested: "I have had Madame Mironowna, the Russian medium. She has produced the loud-speaking trumpet voices. Another nail in the coffin of materialism. Our Borderland Bureau booming. Overwhelmed with applications from people who have lost relatives or friends and who want communication. Extraordinary series of communications. One of them from a tremendous personage. And now comes Sir Raymond Hilary. His attacks in 'The Earth' upon the strongholds of his own science. The materialist faith is in the melting pot. It only needs a great war to complete the work, to bring the newer realisation. God is getting impatient."

Who was it that had said that before? And then it came to him. Father Con, the day they had walked to the Abbey chapel in Dunhallow. All sorts of people, in themselves so different, were saying the same thing, thinking the same thing, more and more throughout the world.

As they spoke, a victoria, in which Asthar and his half-sister were seated behind a pair of splendid blacks, swung past. He looked like a Prince of Assyria, with that deep eye groove set behind the straight monumental nose. But Deirdre, who looked fleetingly at Finn, challengingly he might have thought only that he knew she could never concern herself with so unimportant a person as himself, passed like a ray of light along the greyness of the Street of Words. The gleam of her dusky hair shining above her green dress, framing her face of Eve, seemed to stream the turgid air with colour. Asthar bowed to him delightedly.

"You are coming on Friday?" he shouted unconventionally across the traffic.

Finn blushed. He had been looking at Deirdre.



## XIII

### EAST AND WEST

JOHN L. CRUX had a sect all to himself. He financed it and therefore he owned it.

The Primitive Christians Free Connexion, known throughout America as the Primitive Christians, was entirely up to date. That is to say, it stood for the new confraternity of Religion and Big Business. It had a church in the Fifth Avenue, New York, of a spiritual and physical simplicity, incredible. Its pews as its pulpit were of stark oak, but they were fitted in a sumptuous directness. There was no ornamentation, but in each pew was a discreet "buzzer" to call its inhabitant to the affairs of this world from the affairs of the next. The private autos of its millionaires were round the corner.

The scoffers called it the Church of the Almighty Dollar. They did it injustice. It was also the church of faith—of a new faith. The faith in success and in its God. "Look how it succeeds," Crux had said. "Any of our Sunday morning congregations stand for anything up to three or four hundred millions."

In this church, the minister of God was the Reverend Elias Z. Slick, author of that highly successful book: "Christ, the Business Man." He was also the minister of John L. Crux. He was a big-framed, commanding man with a shearing nose, calculating eyes with swords in them, and a mouth, clean-shaven and powerfully acquisitive, the edge of his personality being softened or hardened, just as you chose to look at it, by the frame of grey beard that ran round his face under the chin.

He had originally owned and run a successful ring of Penny Bazaars in a group of villages up-State in New York, but had had a "call." He had had several "calls," each one, fortunately,

financially better than the last. But the call to the church on Fifth Avenue was the best of all.

It was not that the Reverend Elias was not genuine. He was genuine, with a capacity for self-conviction almost amounting to sincerity. It was the secret of his influence, and there are very few Machiavellis in the world. The Reverend Elias was not one of them.

Crux had established a sort of Primitive Christian branch in Limehouse, London, with plenty of loaves and fishes, installing it in a barrack building of comfortable red brick. Under the trained guidance of the Reverend Slick, especially loaned from the Fifth Avenue, it had been a success from the beginning. It had an excellent cinema theatre attached, a soup kitchen of a superior brand, and every modern convenience, including what one may term a Big Business heaven and a hell reduced to the irreducible minimum. The Limehousers streamed to the hand that fed. A big white hand that gave ungrudging.

It was his Limehouse experiment that Mr. Crux intended grafting on Black Rock.

In his dour way, he was delighted with the Black Rock possibilities as outlined by Finn, and to his son Parker he talked about "exploitation" more than ever. With that flashing intuitive way of the really great business man, for intuition plays a greater part than calculation in the massing of millions, he rough-sketched his plan, which was simple as the establishment in the Avenue.

It included a patent church; the Reverend Slick, and a plethora of loaves and fishes. "Religion makes 'em easy to manage," he said, the Röntgen eye looking through his son into the mists of Ireland. "And besides, it's good for 'em." But there were no mists for John L. Crux. He was not misty.

It was not that Crux was only anxious to make money. Money to the man of millions is meaningless. It is the adventure of it that pulls, but with that shrewd conservation of energy that makes the organiser of money what he is, he thought of killing two birds with one stone—one for the Lord and one for himself. He was sincerely anxious to convert these "Papists" from complex to Primitive Christianity. He was anxious to give them the benefit of that brand of Christianity

which, in his opinion, had been that held by its Founder—with all modern advantages added.

He knew as the man of power, whether king or priest, has known in all ages, that full revelation was not possible to the mob. That was for the elect such as himself, his son and those captains of industry who helped to form the congregation of the church in Fifth Avenue. Revelation for the workers had to be modified, as carefully as Thrum modified his news for that congregation of his which, as he had told Finn, extended through the world. Not only was Crux a fervent believer in hell-fire, but he subscribed to hell-fire organisations like that of General Bliss because he sincerely believed "the fear of God" necessary to obedience. Had a literal, concrete hell been available, he would have put the anarchist or socialist into its flames with as little compunction and with as entire conviction as his private gunmen had shot down the mob at his Arizona Belle Copper mine, when they had tried to wreck the plant.

Finn, who had heard something of the new project, was thinking on some of these things, which came to him shadowy enough in his newer realisation of his employer, on his way to "The Cloisters." The genuineness of this man, combined with the strange difference between what he said and what he did, puzzled him as much as the same thing in Thrum and so many others. But out of the cauldron of thought the picture of that ruined chapel of grey stone up there on Carrickmore looking out over the seas always resurrected itself; and then the picture of the Limehouse church, which he had seen, and its pastor. "Upon this rock shall I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." That utterance of Father Con kept recurring like the beat of a hammer. But the Primitive Christians were not the gates of hell.

These thoughts soon passed into other and more concrete considerations. Or rather, one other. His clothes. He was going to dinner in a morning coat of doubtful cut, into which his father and mother had forced him some six months before, "because tails look respectable." He had no dress clothes. He blushed and sweated alternately.

Finn Fontaine was not the Finn of even three months before. He was a much less concrete Finn, a Finn whose soul and even whose body was in a state of disintegration, leaving him with a feeling of helplessness. Perhaps the comment,

as he passed the Houses of Parliament, of the megatheric policeman on duty at the entrance to the House of Commons expressed him as well as anything else: "A queer looking customer as ever I did see. Looks as though he had escaped from a caravan and didn't know what to do with himself."

He was a queer customer, ungainly, huge, with an indescribable look of being too big or was it too craggy, for his environment? The pile of the parliament houses did not overwhelm—it threw him into relief as age throws youth.

The door was opened by Togo, to bring to him the gold and ivory of one of Chopin's nocturnes that whispered from under the closed door on his left like the crepitation of the leaves in a church yard, gusted hither and thither by the autumn wind. The notes passed from a whisper to a ripple, rose into the glug-glug of nightingales to fill the house with melody, and then ceased. A blue-grey ghost fled up the stairs before him like a cloud. It was a great cat.

As the door closed behind him, Big Ben chimed the three quarters. He was too early.

But Paris Asthar received him between the high panellings of oak under the low ceiling as though he had been a prince—and Paris another, with that exquisite courtesy, the sincerity of which lifted it above the shallowness of tact. Finn was the first to arrive.

As the others began to come, Asthar led him over to a corner where he placed in his hands a copy of Dante's "Inferno," adorned by a series of drawings by Albrecht Dürer. Finn, grateful for the relief of the book and the corner, found the illustrations so interesting that he almost forgot the others until he heard the high silver voice of Asthar introducing a lank, rank, young curate, of monkish aspect, whom he called "my friend John Durring."

The young clergyman was very earnest in a jerky way with galvanic movements of the shoulders and clenchings of the big red-grained hands, and very depressed. Before ten minutes had passed, Finn had heard that he was a Socialist High Churchman suffering under the low church unimagining of the Bishop of Whitechapel, the man who had once confirmed Finn in the Forestford Church, who, as the Reverend John Durring, speaking of the revolutionary social reform currents within the church, complained, could not see what the devil these

things were for. For his part he, with other members of the Church Socialist Union, wished to bring back the communism of the Early Church and abolish the principle of private property, and generally seemed to picture a world of High Church broadclothed workingmen and corduroyed dukes filling the churches.

As he spoke the apple in his throat moved up and down like a shuttle. His voice was hoarse from much street speaking—one of his differences with the Bishop. Jock MacAdam, whose agitation for the unemployed had been filling the papers, he seemed to regard as a sort of second Christ. "You know, my dear Fontaine," he had dropped the "Mr." from the first go-off, "the mistake we Christians make is thinking there is only one saviour of mankind. Saviours are always coming, though, of course, only one was God. MacAdam is one of them. Some day we shall have woman-Christ, MacAdam, says, but I don't go so far as that; and Jock is not even a professing Christian."

He was moistly earnest, being very sweaty and a little inclined to spit in his more enthusiastic periods, but he could no more resist Paris Asthar than anyone else, and he confided in Finn that he had a passion "to save his soul." "He worships the Devil," he had said to Finn in an earnest and slightly ridiculous way, and went on to say that he knew a man, a clergyman, to whom Asthar had shown a little chapel in "The Cloisters," complete with altar, in which everything, including the chalice, had been stolen from Christian churches.

He had become almost violently moist as he recounted this story, of which Finn could make neither head nor tail, except that he gathered that Asthar worshipped the Devil because he worshipped power.

Finally, he had got back to his other hero, MacAdam, and got Finn's promise to take part in a procession of the unemployed from Tower Hill to the West End in January, which he was to help to lead. He had been angry with Asthar, who had complained that he would be compelled to give up his and Deirdre's favourite drive along the Embankment "because those unemployed fellows have started using it for their promenades." To anything that his host said or did, he seemed to attach extraordinary importance, and this remark of his seemed to depress him unduly.



Finn came out of the word storm of the young curate to find a girl who was sitting in a low chair in one corner of the room, under the stem of a high seven-branched candelabra, watching him from under her dark lashes. She was an unusual looking girl with a high unevenness of shoulder and of a whip-like slenderness, or it might have been something twisted in a graceful perverse way. But what stamped itself upon the retina of his mind were the grey eyes with the tiny pin-points of black iris that stared at him, and the nostrils, proportioned, but hungry and spreading. The tempered light fell upon her masses of hair of a polished copper, done low upon a skin of a whiteness that made his pulses beat, whilst, as he looked, a black shape flashed across the green silk of her dress. It was Beelzebub, the black cat, who from some unseen coign of vantage, had sprung to the floor.

On turning his eyes away in confusion, he discovered that the room was full of people who had knotted themselves together in corners, or formed around some nucleus of interest.

Paris Asthar, with the contrariness that distinguished him, liked bringing together men and women of the most diversified types, which had resulted more than once in something like a free fight. It was his own habit, as he said, "to keep the ball rolling" by passing from group to group, withdrawing himself at intervals to watch the results from some point whence he would smile that queer, haunting smile of which his crony, Spearbohn, the caricaturist, had written that it was "the smile of a damned soul."

This evening he had collected one or two men of science, including Professor Dust and Sir Lancaster Hogge, who, as scientific enemies, he always brought together whenever possible. They were now at it hammer and tongs at the end of the room near the high sacramental candelabra. The strident laugh of Sir Lancaster, "an infidel laugh," as John Durring had confided to Finn, had many times come to the ear of the boy during the evening, raising itself above the riot of words. The white teeth of Ali Baba gleamed in the dark corners and caught the reflection of the irregular groups of wax candles with which the place was lighted. There were some political nonentities, looking highly uncomfortable, who were really quite important personages in their constituencies. And there were some of



the feminine young men and masculine young women from the Esoteric.

Professor Dust, who had broken himself free from the strident Hogge, was in one corner saying to a group of these last, who viewed him with the slightly raised eyebrows of an amused scepticism, in emphatic shocked solemnity, something about ghosts, repeating the word with slightly staring eyes: "Ghosts, ghosts . . ." and then, fainter, Finn thought he heard something about "trematodes."

But one figure there stood out from all others, and yet he had not seen the man until his eyes by chance had looked towards Asthar, who stood near him. It was that of a turbaned Indian of a skin that might have been that of a sun-tanned European, and a height that towered over all others there save Paris Asthar himself. He had the face of a child with its firm, rather full, lips and rounded cheeks. The eyes were languorous, not lacking, however, in a certain kind of intellectual vigour.

The shoulders, veiled by his white robe, were broad but sloping in the way that often conceals in boxers a cat-like activity combined with great strength, something that seemed to balance the spiritual quality in the man. Not that his figure was muscular. It was round, but in a firm, soft way. His face had the child-like smile of a Buddha that, knowing all, was tolerant of all.

To Finn these two men, standing there together under the low ceilings of "The Cloisters," looked two monumental figures dwarfing all else. But they were two figures antagonistic. Finn felt that instinctively, just as he felt that despite the same fatherland, Srî Kapila, as he learnt the name of the Indian, and Ali Baba, who through the evening alternately cringed and snarled to the other, had nothing in common save colour.

Finn was looking at this variegated movement of a new world, when Togo announced dinner. The guests began to move towards the swing doors leading into the adjoining room, which, with the heavy curtain that veiled them, had been thrown back to show a table of exquisite napery and glass and silver adorned only by some dead white roses. The boy, abashed, and wondering whether he ought to offer his arm as he had seen the others, felt a little touch on his sleeve and found himself looking down upon the girl with the shining

hair whom he had seen looking at him from under the candleabra.

"You are Mr. Fontaine, are you not?" she said in her soft, purring way. Finn admitted it.

"Paris says you are to take me in to dinner. I am Stella Fay." She paused with a little malicious smile as she saw the boy's confusion. "You are not afraid of me, are you?" she said, showing two rows of little white teeth. "I'm not going to bite you."

Finn was not so sure. Those little white teeth behind the red lips looked as like biting as anything could. He murmured something.

By this time the others had gone in to dinner, leaving them alone in the shadow of the swing door where it was thrown back.

The girl all at once looked up at Finn, came face to face with him, and said solemnly, her eyes serious: "Little boy, I'm going to spoil you." And as she said it she stood on tip-toe, her hands behind her back and kissed Finn full on the lips.

Finn, by all his precedents, should have been shocked. He was not. The warm full pressure of those red lips made every drop of blood in his body recede to his heart, which contracted as though something at that moment had entered it, but he did not feel shocked. Nor glad. He felt overwhelmed, satiated, curious. For no lips had ever pressed his save the leathery lips of his aunts and mother and the warmer whickered lips of his father.

He turned to find Togo as though he had that moment come up a trap door, his face expressionless, waiting to close the doors behind them. Yet it seemed to Finn that behind the mask there sat a grin.

He felt the light touch of the fingertips on his arm, was faintly conscious of Asthar's look of quizzing enquiry as they took their places at the table, and then the array of forks and spoons frightened him so much that he forgot the kiss and the girl and everything.

He came out of his preoccupation to find the dinner and conversation in full blast, with all sorts of people exchanging views unconventionally across the table. It came to him afterwards, that amazing cross-fire of conversation and idea, in

which Asthar, as was often his way, was silent, listening. The great bulk of the man, in it something of authority, sitting there at the head of the table, one hand smoothly curved about the stem of his wineglass; the prominent heavy eye set behind the sheer of the nose, the curves of the small, rather sick mouth, all impressed themselves upon the boy. So, it seemed to him, must men have sat at feasts in the days when Bel-shazzar was king.

Following a chance remark of Asthar, this extraordinary conversation had begun with a eulogy from Finn's partner of the Universalists and Universalism and of their leader, Ellen Masters, who, with her followers, had claimed to pierce the worlds of the astral. She had then passed on in what might have been mere flippancy or might have been deadly earnest to speak of leaving the body in her dreams to swim in astral seas, and declared that even whilst swimming in the physical body, she was able to leave it at will and so, by resting it, to accomplish the extraordinary feats in the water for which she was already famous. (But all this was afterwards much confused in Finn's mind and was only a sidelight upon this amazing dinner party.)

Stella Fay had then gone on to expatiate upon what she called that "Light from the East," which was one of the cornerstones of the new faith, a faith which seemed to have in its mosaic a fragment of every religion in the world, but which seemed to derive its main inspiration from India, through it running a medley of Hinduism and Buddhism with other Asiatic religions.

It was in fact an attempt to unite the religions of the world and to find in all religions from the beginning of time a common nucleus. A new religion in Persia had already begun to do this, with a success that had brought millions of adherents throughout the world, but it seemed that, great though it was, it fell far behind Universalism in beauty and truth—two words which were constantly on Stella Fay's lips.

Upon all this she discoursed, enthusiastic and dogmatic, although at times in a sort of brilliant flippancy, sometimes flashing into asides that made Sir Lancaster Hogge snort and caused Professor Dust, who sat only a couple of places away, to scratch his scalp in good-natured puzzlement and to peer around his partner to look at the speaker as though she had been mad. All this to her exceeding delight.

She finished by declaring that matter had no existence and

that all was *maya* or illusion, turning eagerly to the white-robed Indian for corroboration.

But Sṛī Kapila was elusive. He would not commit himself and suavely turned the conversation to a comparison of the science of the East and West, which he said were each the converse of the other, the West in the realm of the material and the East in that of the spiritual, which, however, were really one and the same thing, a statement that brought a triumphant "I told you so" from Stella Fay. There was only one though vital difference in the eastern and western concepts—in the East, science and religion were one and the same thing—in the West they were antagonistic.

But he made it very clear in that soft resonant English of his that the East had passed through the stage of materialistic science and had in fact antedated many of the modern discoveries not only in biology but in physics. The West was engaged with the infinitely small and the East with the infinitely great—the first investigating the molecule and endeavouring to split the atom, the latter analysing the spirit of which matter was only the shadow—but both small and great were the infinite. And he went on to say that even molecules were made up of atoms and atoms of electrons and electrons of something still smaller, but each of these infinitesimal particles of matter were really systems, paralleling the solar system, with their own suns and planets; and that what we called our solar system was but an electron in another and greater system, and that in its turn but the infinitesimal part of another.

And all this, despite the attempted angry incursions from Dust and Hogge, he laid down so quietly and so assuredly that it ceased to be dogma and became merely the demonstration of a master to a pupil.

Through all this, Ali Baba's teeth had shone derisively. Finn could not get away from those teeth. They haunted him. It seemed to him that they bared themselves in a sort of snarl. But the snarl of a wild beast that knows its master, for Ali Baba only smiled. He did not criticise.

Once and only once the atmosphere became charged almost to ignition. It was after Sir Lancaster Hogge had sneered about the Indian caste system, which he said in words not too finely chosen was degrading and prohibitive of all intellectual

advance for the Indian, of whose intellectual capacity and possibilities he obviously had only contempt.

The turbaned Indian inclined his head in grave courtesy. "I agree with you, Sir Lancaster," he said, "but Indian caste is already beginning to dissolve. Before the twentieth century is out we shall have no caste in India as it is understood to-day. Even now, fraternisation between Mahomedan and Hindu has begun."

"That's all very fine," sneered Sir Lancaster, whom the Indian's placidity seemed to enrage, "but you *have* caste."

"And have you no caste system?" Sri Kapila rejoined quietly. "Have you none here in Europe? . . . and at Simla?" he added after a moment. "At Simla, where there is the red cord of the vice-regal receptions which only the vice-regal party can pass. And in the Indian army where there are the castes of engineers, of artillery, of cavalry and of infantry, as carefully graded as anything that India has, and in India generally where you separate the wholesale merchant from the retailer?" A silence had followed his words. He added with a soft smile: "And yet there is caste and always will be caste, for we shall always have spiritual aristocracy."

It was at this point that Paris Asthar, without seeming to do so, and by comparing the artists of India and Europe, turned the conversation to art, which, he said, was the heart of religion. He talked of art as the saviour of the world, when John Durring, the apple in his throat working excitedly, interposed to foreshadow a time when the art of the future would be understood of all men, as some of the Russians were teaching, an assertion which Asthar had combated in brilliant good nature.

"Art, the finest art, will never be understood by the mob," he had said and had glided into a scintillating disquisition of what art was. "The essence of art," he said, "is that it is artificial. The mob is natural."

It was here that Finn made his first and last intrusion into the discussion, bursting out uncontrollably: "Art is not art—art is life," and had subsided before the eyes that turned on him. As he said it, he felt the silken knee of his partner brush his leg slightly under the table. But that might have been accident. She looked at him, glowing, in embarrassing approval.



It was after they got back into the drawing room where the ladies had preceded them, his senses still befogged after his experiences, that he heard a voice, a dark, vibrant contralto, coming from the corner of the room. At the sound, his heart stopped beating, and then he saw the singer seated in a distant corner, with a great lute of some polished wood slung across the slender shoulders of her evening gown, made of some fine stuff of a black bronze, the lute striking fire from the hair above. The eyes that looked out over the strings were softly glowing, the body bending forward in tender graciousness, as her arms, fine and rounded and bare to the shoulders as the arms of young athletes seen in sunlight are bare, moved slowly across the strings under the shaded lights. She was singing what Finn knew afterwards as "The Shadow Song."

Come, dear heart, where the shadows play  
Out in the mists of yesterday.  
Come, dear heart, where the shadows fall  
Over there on the eastern wall.  
Come, dear heart, where the shadows creep  
To the twilight edge of to-morrow's sleep.  
Come, dear heart, where the shadows fly  
Over the faint of the western sky.  
Come, dear heart, on the shadows' flight  
As we whisper together the last Good-night . . .

Finn, looking at the singer, started to find that the eyes, dark and glowing, were gazing full at him out from the veil of her hair, but as he quickly realised, unseeing.

As the song came to an end in the shadows of a room which, the wax candles dying in their sockets, was lit only by the gleam of the logs in the great fireplace, Finn, the spell broken, turned to find the eyes of the girl with the copper hair looking at Deirdre Asthar, now silent, where she sat over her lute, with something of smiling hate in them, and beyond her, Asthar, looking at them both. And then they had turned to Finn, eager, hungry, but with something of anger in them, and, as he met them, he felt the vague sense of irritation with Deirdre Asthar he had felt that day at the office of "The Earth," and his pulses once more flamed to the kiss which still haunted his lips.

He went away under the black starry firmament with this



irritation stirring in him like some poison, with, underneath, something still deeper trying to make itself felt. Out of the doorway behind there came Hogge's strident laugh. He saw the Indian standing under the shadow of the Lords looking up into the night skies. He wondered of what he was thinking. And then the night swallowed him up.

And over all space and the cold stars with something of incense, that as he looked, seemed to climb upwards to the depths of black and gold above.

## XIV

### THE HUNGER LINE

It was a ragged-looking nebula that formed and unformed, now turning in upon itself, now scattering sluggishly inside the gates of the Marble Arch this afternoon of high sun, veiled but imminent behind the January haze. There was something about this grey mass, formless, purposeless, which to Finn, standing near the gates, seemed to inhibit organisation of any kind. That this incoherency should become processionally coherent seemed nonsense.

A pair of dejected, broken-mouthed men, with a growth upon their leaden faces like a grey fungus and jaws that drooped towards shirtless breasts, looked at the bandoliers that slipped from their thin shoulders and which were to support the staffs of the calico banner with the black lettering:

### WORK—NOT CHARITY!

as though they did not know what to do with them. About them, the ground was moist with their thin expectorations, the last emphasis of their manhood. A few yards away, a man in a broken bowler and a braided frock coat made for an aristocrat of more comfortable habit, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, expectorated nonchalantly upon the frayed trousers of the man before him and looked upon the result, emitting the brown stream once more through the fringes of the ragged moustache at the same target and hitting it with the accuracy born of practice. He regarded his work with a certain sodden satisfaction, whilst a few paces beyond, a little man in the frock coat which in that crowd seemed the very vestment of unemployment, with the face of a rabbit, browsed between the legs of his fellows for cigarette ends. Finn caught the glutinous satisfaction upon the outline of his muzzle as he

popped the stump of a cigar into his mouth and began to chew with a nibbling movement.

But Finn noticed one thing. Unemployment seemed a male property. There was no woman in the crowd.

Here a man in a sugarloaf hat, with something of resistance to things still remaining, was striking one thin hand into the palm of the other as he declaimed to a fungoid group of down and outs who regarded him in hang-dog doubt.

"Guts," Finn heard him say with a kind of crack at the end of his sentences, ". . . if ye'd the guts of a worm ye'd do 'em in. Christ! They've got their wines and their wimin, and you—what d'ye call yerselves? . . ." He looked up to catch the clean white eye of a policeman and tailed off . . . "wot d'ye call yerselves . . . ?" and then, ineffective, almost in a whisper—"well, wot *do* ye call yerselves?" Then he was silent.

A few minutes before and it had looked to Finn as though all the scarecrows there could have been stuck in a cabbage patch. Men had only trickled into the park in twos and threes, and even this trickle had now been stopped by a cordon of police across the entrance, yet the groups, breaking and forming again, now appeared to take a certain consistency as they fermented together. Each group seemed to ferment around some particular head, which would bob up and go down again like a blob of yeast in a stewpan. It was a frowsy, lousy scum of grey-faced grey-lipped men upon whose skins the slime of hunger traced itself as though snails had crawled there.

The Reverend John Durring, hoarse, the apple in his throat moving excitedly in profile from where Finn stood, bobbed up and down as he moved from group to group urging them vainly to form up behind the men with the calico banner, who, with a little bunch of leaders, stood forlornly near the gates with the banner in position.

This little group of leaders was headed by a tall man, swelling-chested, who stood there on his long aristocratically thin legs, holding his soft deerstalker in his hand whilst he wiped his forehead with a red bandana handkerchief. His masses of hair, parting themselves with difficulty at the side, fell over his face. After he had put his hat back on his head, he stood with his hands stuck in the pockets of his short jacket, thumbs outside, a silk tartan bow drooping from under his beard as

he lifted it up with one hand and held it pointing pugnaciously at the sky. His mouth look as though a cutty stuck there—but there was no cutty.

By his side stood a big man with forked red Viking beard, who, as John Durring's efforts to get the mass of men into position failed, all at once sprang into violent motion, running from group to group, shouldering some here and pushing others there. As his efforts proved as vain as those of the young clergyman, his face became purple, his forked beard standing out defiant, whilst he tried to make his voice heard over the rising din, for the crowd had begun to cheer aimlessly whilst all talked together. The big man stood there like a baited bull, the great mouth opening itself in bellowings that went unheard in that silly meaningless commotion where all talked and cheered together. One could only see the maw opening and shutting and the red of the gums. His arms were moving, his face distorted.

It was John Durring, stopping a moment, who told him that these two men were Jock MacAdam and Broadribb, "Red Borb."

So that was Broadribb, "Red Borb," as his name had become corrupted to that of love or hate—Red Borb, the anti-Christ, as his father always called him. Like thousands of other children, he had been brought up to regard this apostle of Karl Marx, the German Socialist, as a sort of red devil who only awaited the right moment to wade knee-deep in the blood of society, with Jock MacAdam as his satellite. He looked lurid enough, anyhow. But MacAdam, somehow he was different. People said he believed in Christ, or anyhow in Christianity.

Now he was standing there on his high clean legs with his hands set deep in his cross pockets, brooding over the mass as a watchful hen over her chickens. The broken circling had now begun to change under the efforts of Red Borb into something like a forward movement towards the gates of the park. As, indolent, the masses took form, here and there at their side one of the big, cleanly shaven policemen showed himself, whilst a man upon a powerful black horse, who seemed to have come out of the earth, a sleek, dark-bearded man, directed operations with a certain official immobility. A polished scabbard at his side shone against the jet of his knee-boots. As

his riding lash dropped from his hand, Finn saw two or three of the broken looking men near him hurry officiously forward to pick it up and return it to the owner, who thanked them by a good-natured indulgent laugh.

The head of the procession, silent, moved out between the gates, behind it the masses of unemployed shuffled after upon their broken boots. Finn, from his place at the head, by the side of Durring, sweating and enthusiastic, could hear that cretaceous shuffle behind him, as a march of dead men. Not a sound came from the grey line. As they moved out of the gates, three mounted policemen showed themselves at the head. The smooth necks, set upon the broad shoulders, the whole pillared upon the bay horses, the muscles of which came and went under the skins of satin, looked part of some ordered restless force—coherency dominating the inchoate.

The procession was originally to have marched from Tower Hill to Trafalgar Square, but the head of the London police, who was a Jew, and therefore a man of imagination, had suggested the reverse direction, by which he hoped to avoid the adherents of the larger and rougher East-end element. He had been disappointed, for the grey faces had poured out from their hiding places in the West-end, faces of the same breed. The order for the demonstration had been as rigidly laid down as though it were for the passage of an army. Park Lane, Piccadilly, Regent Street, Northumberland Avenue, the Embankment . . . If Disorder wished to demonstrate it could do so, but only within the channels of Order. With much native humour the young minister who had originally won his reputation by being the best-dressed M. P. in the House, had said in reply to questions asked about the procession: "We don't mind demonstrations, so long as they only demonstrate." A crowded House had laughed and the joke had provided the head lines for one of the dailies the next morning.

As they turned out of the Marble Arch, Finn was surprised to find the space outside almost impassable. Every thieves' kitchen and casual ward in the West-end seemed to have emptied their contents around the Arch. Mounted policemen were backing their horses good-humouredly upon the toes of the crowd, but finding resistance from people who themselves were wedged immovable by the masses behind, began to get angry under the eye of the bearded man. The eye had a quality

of remoteness, calmly ignorant of the excited expostulations addressed to it by the crowd. "Cawrn't ye see guv'nor? There's millions of 'em," said one excited little man, mouth and nose working. It was the rabbit man of the cigar stump. The Reverend John Durring in his excitement had even ventured to lay sacrilegious hand upon the heel of the law, which responded by a detached kick, the head above indifferent and moving unevenly over the crowd under the application of the spur. Great motorbuses reared their heads like wounded mammoths from over a mob which, swarming them for refuge, hung like clusters of bees.

The man on the horse began to get excited as a whole hour went by without the crowd moving. His reputation was at stake. A great church procession from St. Paul's to Westminster via the Embankment had been arranged for the same day and had been timed to reach the Abbey a full hour before the unemployed could get to the river. The Police Commissioner had been doubtful about permitting the two processions on the same day, but the promise to the unemployed leaders had been given some months before, the trade unions were getting unpleasantly touchy about promises, and the church procession being a Procession of Humiliation for the national sins, could only be held upon an appropriate Saint's Day. Even now the procession was so late in starting that it possibly meant meeting that other procession upon the Embankment itself.

Finn felt something thrill him as though he were a filament of the crowd and then something loosen out beyond him in a pressure that was becoming unbearable. And then that mass, which seemed to have its times and its seasons, obeying its own laws, began to move, and soon they were passing the blank façades of Park Lane. The homes of millionairdom looked as though they were made of wedding cake, with something about them cheap and sugary. In one of the houses, which had a sort of gallery at the height of the first floor, the gilt mirrors that showed themselves seemed a cheap yellow mockery.

The crawling, slouching thing behind was silent enough. It dragged itself past the white faces of the houses dumb and unseeing. And then Finn heard a single word:

"Guts." And then:

"If ye'd guts . . ." and then a soft booing like the



lowing of cattle. The voice was the voice of the man in the sugarloaf hat, in that mass secure of his anonymity. But the booing had something ungenuine, something "made" in it.

"Dussen't show theirselves," said a dilapidated young man near Finn. "Dussen't," and then, gaining courage, a little higher, "DUSSEN'T."

An arm had reached into the crowd, had taken the scarecrow by his neck between a pincers of thumb and forefinger, and had run him head downwards out of the procession, shaking him as a dog would shake a rat, the man's neck bending in on itself as though it were broken. Nobody protested.

At the back somebody had begun to sing: "Come where the Booze is cheaper," the song of the moment, in a high cracked voice. For a verse he sang alone, but as he came to the chorus:

"Beer, beer, glorious beer,  
Fill yerself right up to 'ere—*cluck-cluck*.  
Up with the sale of it,  
Down with a pail of it,  
Glorious, glorious beer!

the whole procession joined in. "Glorious, glorious beer," made the high façades of Piccadilly ring again, that curious *cluck-cluck* demonstrative of satisfaction, made by thousands of tongues buried in as many palates and then forcibly withdrawn, being very effective. A man near Finn made a motion of taking up a bucket to his lips and drinking. But it had become mixed and finally tailed off under the sugary sentiment of "When Little Willie Died and Went to Heaven," which was sung with that lachrymose sweetness beloved of the English working class:

When little Willie died and went to 'eaven,  
The hangels came a flutterin' rahnd 'is bed.  
O'er the bed they spread their wings,  
As wiv' crowns and 'arps they sings,  
When little Willie died and went to 'eaven.

He knew it was trash, but the sound of all those slouchers raising their voices together as in a great lamentation, brought something to his throat, especially when the rhythm checked an instant at the end of the fourth line. It was all meaningless, but he found his eyes were wet with tears.

As they marched, each corner gave its quota to the procession. The steam of the dirty bodies came to him in a sickly sweetness of crowded rooms. Somewhere in front of them a red banner with white letters:

“Christ died on the Cross—the rich live on it!”

had appeared, flouting all the rules for such things by walking backwards. Near him, two men began to argue as to the meaning.

“Gor lumme! cawrn’t ye see it? On the crawss. Get that? Yer know wot livin’ on the crawss means.” And the other voice serious, expostulatory: “But they don’t come any bloomin’ jokes over us . . . tell yer, mate, it’s got a ’idden meanin’—that’s wot it ’as.”

“This is a great day!” said Durring, grinding his enormous red hands together as he marched. “They must listen. Why, Melrose, last night in the House . . .”

His remark was lost in a storm of groaning that went up from the men about them. Finn saw that all eyes were turned to the left, eyes that lifted themselves weakly. They were passing the high windows of the Warwick and were looking at the well-dressed comfortable clubmen who had got up from their afternoon cups of tea or whiskies and sodas to look down at the procession as at a spectacle.

A fist rose in the air and shook weakly against those high entrenchments. Ragged arms were lifted thinly. Two banners, both of them Durring’s idea, moved round menacingly to face the windows; one: “I asked for bread and ye gave me a stone,” and the other, savagely ironic: “I was an hungered . . . and ye took me in.” A storm of booing went through the crowd, but the men in the windows only smiled. Finn could see one man, he was a young, well-fed man, clean-shaven and with ruby cheeks, who, his newspaper in his hand, smiled down. The crowd, always searching for a concrete victim, fastened on this one man. His smile seemed to drive them mad. But to Finn it seemed that the faces about him were aping ferocity rather than feeling it. It was as though they were acting a part.

“Go in and pull ’im aht from his bloody club!” shouted the man in the sugar-loaf hat with that queer crack at the end of his voice.

"That's it. Pull 'im aht!" But nobody moved from the ranks.

"Cut the guts aht of 'im! Giv' 'im wot for. Bloody calf."

But nobody moved. Jock MacAdam stalked forward unconcernedly upon his long legs, the bow of silk plaid flying from under the iron-grey beard that jutted, pugnacious. Only Durring seemed unduly moved. Finn, feeling his grip on his arm, was astonished to find his face white and shaking.

"I would go up and do it," he said tremblingly. "Those . . . those men who dishonour our common Christianity. . . ."

But now they had moved past, the groans had died away, and there was only the dragging of the feet over the streets, with something reptilian in it.

Until they got to the Embankment, the great procession remained in its brute silence. The police had cleverly cut off the false head of the procession with its red and white banner, forcing it down a by-street, and leaving Finn once more with a clear view.

As they passed on to the Embankment under the Charing Cross bridge, where the steamers hooted like lost souls on the slimy tides, Finn was surprised to see another procession advancing to meet them—perhaps half a mile away. Seen at that distance, it looked like a lot of women with smocks of white linen drawn over their petticoats, a scatter of gold and crimson waving above. In front, the sun glinted upon something metallic.

His attention was diverted by a commotion just behind him. He turned to find a victoria which coming from the direction of Westminster had apparently tried to drive through the crowd. It was a beautifully turned out equipage, drawn by a pair of black horses and driven by a coachman with a footman by his side, imperturbable, his arms crossed.

In response to the voice of some unseen occupant, the coachman again tried to drive through the crowd, which from silence had risen into a growl of anger. Upon the coachman hesitating a moment, a high trumpet-like voice commanded: "Drive on, Richardson!" Again he attempted to get his horses through.

In a moment half a dozen of the ragamuffins had sprung at the bridles of the horses, which, rearing, drove the carriage back a few yards. As they did so, a couple of police-

men bore down on them. To Finn they looked like so many toothless rats, as they fell back snarling, but powerless.

As the horses turned away, he saw sitting in the carriage two figures—Asthar and his sister. The former smilingly indifferent, the latter with a look at once disgusted and contemptuous, with something in it of ice and fire. She looked at Finn and then at the unemployed behind him, and the head turned away.

In that moment he hated the girl with the hair of bronze and it was in that moment he felt that some choice had to be taken. There was something, vague, passionate, driving at him from underneath that seemed to come at him out of the masses around him.

But now they were in motion again and they could see the whites of the eyes of the men at the head of the other procession.

It was then that Finn saw that the thing upon which the sun had shone was a great brass cross, carried at the head, behind it row upon row of clergymen, all in full canonicals. The cross reared itself under the sullen fires of the January sun. Now, at the head of the unemployed, a red rag reared itself crazily. It was a piece of red flannel hanging from a clothes prop. It flaunted itself against that other symbol, nodding at it drunkenly. But the cross moved on, majestic, assured.

As they neared one another, shepherded by the police to one side and the other, the black and white procession broke into a hymn, led by a brass band in uniform of sober black. The voices raised themselves there upon the grey embankment in full-throated assurance:

Oh God! our help in ages past,  
Our hope in years to come.  
Our shelter from the stormy blast,  
And our eternal home.

with an unconsciousness that yet had something of immortality in it.

The streams were passing now. The serious, well-paunched dignitaries at the head, in mortarboards and cowls of black and crimson, behind them the leaner, younger men, all marching in a step that had in it the spirit of order, the assuredness that comes from the traditions of centuries. Slouching by

them, the thin grey line of the workless, the red flag jerking drunkenly at the head.

A voice had started "The Red Flag." It was a high-strained, jerky voice with something of hysteria in it. The masses behind had joined in and were droning it with the same sentimentality with which they had sung "When Little Willie Died and Went to Heaven." Only now there was something of challenge in it. To Finn, it, too, sounded like a hymn. Looking up at the line: "The banner bright, the symbol plain," he caught sight of the red rag borne aloft and it seemed to him that that, too, was a symbol. But of what?

His dreams were broken by a raucous bass close under his ear which had broken the following silence, singing alone:

What is this, the sound and rumour?

What is this that all men hear?

Like the wind in hollow valleys when the storm is drawing near,  
Like the rolling on of ocean in the eventide of fear,

'Tis the people marching on.

There was a moment's stillness, and then in low thunder like the breaking of surf upon distant beaches, came the response from the ragged host behind, first from one or two and then from the mass, which droned the tune where it did not know the words:

Hark! the rolling of the thunder!

Lo, the sun, and lo, thereunder

Riseth wrath and hope and wonder

And the host comes marching on.

And then the thing came to him as though in that moment somebody had asked him the question out there from the sullen mists through which the sun, now low in the sky, showed itself, a fiery red ball. Where was Christ—here or there?

Here, with this Disorder of workless, sodden wretches, of wolfish eyes and mouths—or over there, behind Order?

Behind the Cross or the Red Flag?

Where was he? Where?

The thin grey line dragged itself on like a wounded snake on its belly, but intent, deadly, untiring, into the eye of the sullen sun as though some distant goal were there behind the lowering mist.

## XV

### THE HOUSE OF DREAMS

When Finn had stood one day upon an iron ledge of rock that jutted into green depths at the foot of Carrickmore, he had seen deep below him something white and silvery, that, caught in the undertows which haunted those troubled waters, moved aimless. Then a dark shape had swum athwart this thing of vague whiteness, which at once became instinct with life, and this shape had been followed by others, causing it to rush from side to side and gradually to get smaller until it had disappeared.

To-day he felt like that piece of bait in deep waters. It seemed to him that he was the prey of unseen forces, or if seen, then not understandable. His father and mother; Father Lestrangle; the ash-covered books; Thrum; the grey stone chapel on the top of Carrickmore; Paris Asthar . . . and those other two forces, sinister, unfathomable—the girl with the copper hair and Deirdre Asthar. Behind all this had come that march of the unemployed together with the vague shadow of something the world was calling Democracy, which seemed to hide all the good and evil of the world. These shadowy things were rushing at him, dragging him from side to side, and would, perhaps, finally engulf him.

He would not be engulfed.

He believed in a sort of mad conviction that he, nervous, diffident, was the equal of any of those others about him. Deep down, especially in those moments of exaltation which seemed to spring at him out of nothing, he believed himself their superior.

Nor did he mean equality in the vulgar sense. Equality was not a question of degree—equality was a principle that ran through life holding together the texture of its stuff. But although he did not admit that he was inferior to these people about him, he knew that men were not equal. Since he had



met Deirdre Asthar, he had begun to hate aristocracy and all for which the word stood. But there was such a thing as spiritual aristocracy and always would be. *That* was how he measured himself with those others.

Thrum might be the master of men's lives, but his kingdom was of this world. However vague, undefined, he began to feel that his kingdom was another kingdom, a kingdom that underlay this world as the worlds to come—the kingdom of the spirit. His poor clothes might send the hot blood fleeing to his cheeks when he had to see Crux, as he now sometimes did, but Crux, even though he feared him, had no more ultimate significance than a dummy. Parker Crux might be heir to millions, but he knew that only a hair-line sometimes prevented him from active assault in the middle of that long white face. Father Lestrangle . . . he faltered. He was different. He was of himself. It was unexplainable, but he knew it.

Stella Fay . . . he was not sure of her. There was that kiss. He did not resent it, and resentment at this time seemed to him the essential of superiority. There had also been other meetings, the memories of which, even though they had been kissless, made him flush uncomfortably.

It was not that he had made love to Stella Fay. Finn was incapable of "making" love. Nor was it that this girl with her limp and grey iris-pointed eyes, had made love to him, but when he was in a room with her, despite the company of others, he was acutely, painfully conscious of her physical presence. Her soft low laugh would come to him over all others. A turn of her high shoulder and he would know it. The scent of her body would seep to him through all other scents.

He had the feeling that she also was conscious of him, that she was always watching him. She had said that first evening at "The Cloisters" as she kissed him, that she was going to spoil him. And she was spoiling him in a silent sort of way. Not actively, physically—and yet it *was* physical—but emotionally. That was why he was unsure of his position to Stella Fay.

And Deirdre . . . He somehow always thought of these two girls together.

He had no doubt about her. He hated her and her class and everything for which she stood. He had been taught the

shame of a man striking a woman, but that day on the Embankment, he would have struck her cold, prideful face without remorse. But where did Asthar stand in all this?

He didn't. Paris Asthar defied placement. He was outside. Well, it didn't matter about him, and he liked him.

But he, Finn Fontaine, was his own master, although he might not be master of his fate. He had read somewhere a line about a man being master of his fate. That was nonsense. No man was master of his fate, for no man's fate could be separated from that of any other. For good or evil, all men and women were bound up together. But that thought was intolerable. It meant being tied up with all those others as a boy, baiting for eels, passes a needle of wool through a handful of worms.

This was the circle which Finn Fontaine always completed. There was nothing clear. He was in his twentieth year. He felt old. He had no philosophy of life. Life was a succession of unrelated incidents and people—a stringing together of people and of incoherencies. He did not understand people or things. And then he would be driven, irrevocably, logically, into the terrifying conclusion that he was the only sane being in a world of madness. But the Jesuit had once said to him that all logic was madness. He had tried to write what he felt.

There had been that sketch he had written about that day on the Embankment. He had set it down whilst he was still hot from the experience. He had sent it the round of papers. Their rejection did not make him wonder, until "The Churchman" refused it. That was incomprehensible. He had tried to express something of the things that had stirred him when the processions passed each other and which he assumed were stirring the Church itself. The organ of orthodoxy did not care a damn for his stirrings.

It was always like that with his writing, and he wrote persistently. Rejection was as meaningless as that rare acceptance. It was battering his head against a wall, invisible but stony.

For a moment he faltered in his stride. There were times when he had impellent longing to be the average. He saw the clerks about him cheered by a drink of whisky; happily boastful of a new pipe, or having "backed a winner," luxuriating in a superior cunning—men with little hopes and little

fears, unstirred by great emotions. He longed to be like them. He tried to make friends with them as one makes friends with curious beasts behind bars.

And then something would happen to send him into the extreme of intolerance. Rather than surrender to their little caged lives he would take a red flag in his hand and go out with those others in frank rebellion . . . But were the lives of those others not drab? Were they also not ambitionless? Were their hopes and fears not as mean as those with whom he worked? And so the circle from which he could not escape. It was as though he could not escape from existence itself—a thought which for a fleeting moment had been insupportable—as though he were being swung, controlless, in sickening orbit inside the film of life without the power to break into the infinity of non-existence and rest that lay beyond. Only once had that come to him, for he knew he was immortal. His immortality was the only thing that held him to life. But he had feared it that once.

Crux had sent for him and had opened with: "Now, then, Fontaine, no more lukewarmedness—you've got to make good." He resolved to do so. He had not shown that keenness which Crux demanded from all who served him. Ireland had been doing her work on him. But once more he resolved.

He was to go with an engineer to Dunhallow in April for the planning of a breakwater and factory at Black Rock. The men were to fish. The women were to pack. The boxes of dried fish were to be sent by boat to Dunhallow at the head of the bay, and there was talk of a light railway from Black Rock to Dunhallow. There was to be the Reverend Slick, there was to be a Sunday School, plus the loaves and fishes, and there was to be a sort of school for instruction in Big Business and Efficiency. It was all simple.

Finn arrived at Dunhallow one April evening in a soft southwest wind and rain that seemed to be the original compost for growing life. Ireland was one great forcing house. Green and mossy. He felt himself expanding under the sun and rain like a flower.

Father Con met him at the train, with Johnny the Saint skirmishing and delighted behind. When the big priest took his hand into his and complimented him upon "growin' like a young fir tree since I saw ye last;" when he looked into

those steady eyes and saw the straight nose and firm jaw; he felt an almost luxurious sense of security as though he had been a child throwing himself into his father's arms. Johnny's hands were several shades darker than on his first visit, although he demonstratively wiped them first upon the tails of his coat, but Finn would as soon have spat in his face as blenched at the handclasp. A sort of holy dirt surrounded him as with a halo.

His reception at the hands of Miss O'Halloran was analytically warm. After Johnny in excessive zeal had flung his Gladstone down upon one of her "specials," as she called the protuberances upon her feet, and after the old Kitty had leaped out in one scorching breath to wither Johnny where he stood, she had measured Finn from her height about his waist-line, had given a little suspicious "H'm!" and had said: "Well, you're bigger anyhow—I hope you're better. There's a nice cup of tea on the hob this minute, for I've just been dhrenching me insides."

Finn could have kissed her and did make what Johnny in the background called "an offer," but for his pains received a slap on the face from virginal acidity. "Oh, 'tis kissing the girls y'are, is it?" the little peering eyes had said. "G'long wid ye wid yer bold bad London ways. And settin' an example to Johnny there that's positively frightful." But satisfaction gleamed deep in the eye-cavity.

Finn was to stay the night in Dunhallow and was to walk out to Black Rock the next afternoon to a Mrs. O'Hara of whom he had heard through Paris Asthar, who lived in a valley near Carrickmore headland and with whom he was to stay. It seemed that Paris knew her through his half-sister, for he had never been in Ireland. Mrs. O'Hara was a widow-woman who lived alone with a little boy, the child of her dead daughter, Annie, and she was a great friend of Deirdre Asthar, whom she had known as a child.

From the moment when the soft pulsation of the tides under the old bridge had sent him to sleep, to the next morning's sun trying vainly to creep through the April mists, seemed but a moment. He woke up exhilarated, feeling the concretions of London dissolving under the mists of Ireland. That scheme of Crux fell away from him as all such concrete things of the life-struggle seemed to fall away in the solvent of Ire-

land. But he remembered that he had to make his arrangements with Mrs. O'Hara and meet the engineer who had preceded him to Black Rock, where he was staying with the *gombeen* man.

The sun had given up the struggle and was now engulfed, remote, as Finn set out in the afternoon on his seven mile tramp. The scent of his waterproof blended with that tang of peat which the warm moist airs seemed to have concentrated. Croagh Cromlech's head was wrapped in clouds, and even the waters of the bay seemed to blend with the sky. As he walked along the mountain road, gradually rising from the sea level, the clouds, sagging, seemed to shut down upon him, blending with a sea-fog which had risen to meet them, until he was as much alone as though he were walking in a case of glass. No sound came to him in the moving transparency. He seemed to be moving up there above a world of shadows.

As with the knotted blackthorn in his hand, a present from Father Con, he walked there remote on the roof of the world, the sound of footsteps came to him out of the woolly consistency. He quickened his pace to catch a moving shadow before him, a woman wrapped in a long hooded cloak, with the hood over her head. He believed her to be some peasant girl on her way to Black Rock.

As he came almost abreast and murmured a polite "Fine morning," the Irish salutation for all such weather, the head in the cloak turned to show a pair of eyes which, in that mist, shone like emeralds. The body of the girl showed itself slenderly under the folds of the fine grey cloak which enwrapped her and his eye, travelling down, saw the finely modelled feet, not too small, shod in a pair of strong but well-fitting porpoise hide boots. All at once, he felt a great shyness.

When he looked up again, his cheeks burning, the face had turned away, and as he was about to quicken his pace to pass on, two gloved hands came up to the hood to throw it back and to set free a tumblement of bronzed hair and a little smile, inscrutable.

It was Deirdre Asthar.

Finn faltered. The last time he had seen this girl, that day on the Embankment, he had hated her. But here, in the soft south-west rain of Ireland, of which she seemed a part, that too dissolved. He felt to her more like a friend.



"How do you do, Mr. Fontaine?" she said, still with that little smile ghosting the firm lips. "Don't you know me?" And she put out her little suède-gloved hand.

Finn took it in his great paw, and remembered as he did so that this was the first time he had ever touched her. He felt miserably shy—the sweat sprang to his forehead under the hard bowler hat and he could feel it trickling down his nose and back. He who at times could talk tempestuously enough, felt, not merely tongue-tied—he felt ridiculous before the eyes that gleamed at him.

"What have you done with your unemployed friends?" the girl asked with a sort of demure mischief at the existence of which Finn had never guessed. In that place, Deirdre Asthar seemed another being than the one he had known in London.

She should not have said it. In that moment, he found conviction and he found tongue.

Deirdre Asthar stared at him, her lips a little parted over the even white teeth, the colour in her fair young cheeks deeper, as she viewed the tornado she had unleashed. Finn believed in democracy. He would rather have been with the rabble down in the gutter that day on the Embankment than sit with her raised above them in her victoria. He talked some wild nonsense about a day coming when these unemployed would be raised from the dust and their masters flung down. He even talked wildly of Internationalism, a word he had caught from Durring and the meaning of which he, frankly, knew little or nothing. As to millions of others, it was to him not much more than a word. He said things which he could not justify by any known method of reasoning, and he knew it, but he hurried on to prevent retort and criticism.

"I thought you were the young man without a tongue," she said after a few moments. "Oh, Mr. Fontaine, how could you deceive a poor girl in that way?" she went on mockingly, in those deep low tones that had something of the chuckle of the blackbird in them.

The soft brogue came from between her lips like a flow of buttermilk. It was another voice than the one the listener had heard that day at Thrums. But in her mockery there was uneasiness, although Finn could not see it. And then in a moment she had become serious and had said to him a



strange thing of which he often thought in the days that followed: "‘Internationalism,’" she had said . . . . "the world . . . . Ireland is more to me than the whole world!"

For a moment they walked together in silence. "You'll be going out to Mrs. O'Hara's," she said, "to the place I call 'The House of Dreams,' or *Tig-na-hAislinge* as we have it in the Irish, where I spent many happy hours the first ten years of my life here in Ireland. Paris told me all about it. I am sorry, but you will have to put up with my presence there. I shall not be troubling you." In the little voice there was that hardening of distant pride. The face had looked out from the veil of the hair and hidden itself again, and now she had replaced the hood.

For a mile they walked silently, Finn uncomfortable and still angry, wishing the mist would swallow her up. The little feet trod assuredly by his side in long, sure steps, the girl apparently quite at her ease. As they reached the grey stone by the side of the road which marked the descent to Black Rock, the mist lifted with the suddenness of Ireland, the sun came out and revealed to him the girl, now uncowed, her hair flying, striding at his side like some wild thing of air that had come to earth.

Before them on the road, a woman, bent, was walking, carrying something strapped loosely on her back. As they came behind her, they noticed the fine coil of dark-brown hair that lay dank upon her neck and then she turned her face to show them a pair of grey-blue eyes under finely arched eyebrows, with a mouth big and full of humour.

"God bless ye! Miss," she said, looking at Deirdre. "It is Paudeen himself I have on me back."

"Thank you, Norah. You promised to let me see him, didn't you? Come over here under the hedge and I will look at him."

The woman gave her a sidelong grateful look and went over to the ditch on the edge of the road carefully swinging her burden to the front to lay it down upon the big grey stone, moisture covered and glistening in the lifting sun. From somewhere below, a lark sprang into the upper air filling it with melody. On their left, a wall of broken stone, a little latchet gate in it, fringed the edge of the blue sea which

stretched itself across to where the glass of the lighthouse gleamed solitary as the sun struck it, on the opposite headland. The waters below were deserted and the black line of the submerged rocks menaced even under that sun.

The woman opened the shawl to disclose a little child. He might have been three or he might have been ten years. The child looked only at his mother, the eyes moving heavily and without control, the poor head hanging broken on its neck as a flower lies broken on its stalk.

The mother took the poor wrappings from about its lower limbs to show them, shrivelled. The skeleton body lay on the rock like a sacrifice.

"I've prayed to the Holy saints and to St. Bride, Miss. Sure haven't I said my prayers day and night up there in the grey chapel for little Paudeen. But he always lies like that. It is neither tongue nor legs that he has. God has put the heavy hand on him. Some do be tellin' me that 'tis 'the good people' that have changed him, Miss. . . ."

She looked at the girl, who had knelt down by the child, pulling off her gloves and throwing her cloak away from her to show a dress of green frieze. The sun sprayed down upon the masses of her hair which fell forward to hide her face, the sunbeams playing hide and seek in the strands. The fine brows, straight-drawn now, with something of anger in them, bent down in puzzlement. She had taken the little rolling head between the two fine white hands and then she had done a beautiful thing. She had stooped and kissed the helpless child upon the pale slobbering lips.

In that moment, Finn standing behind, watching the smooth whiteness of the neck where the bronze meshes had parted themselves, felt something go through him like a pain. It was something that made him catch his breath. He bent a little over the girl. She looked up, caught the glance in his eyes, and then her own had lighted and fallen.

As, silent, they walked away under the sunlight, the girl had flung her cloak back from her shoulders as though she had some difficulty in breathing. As he stole a glance at her, the hardness in the eyes and brows astonished him. It was another girl than that of the moment before. There was something of tense defiance about the figure. And so they passed downwards in long slants to the valley by the sea.

They happened on it where it ran in backward slant through a break in the wall of the cliff on the right. A deep and narrow cleft it was, with a little stream, fringed by the red foxglove, murmuring along its base, to fall here, in miniature cascades, there, to spread out in what Deirdre called "dotey" pools in which the speckled brown trout swam.

It was a green, almost treeless, valley in which the shamrock, amongst the rocks that hung over the stream, grew in places unsuspected, the sides of which were marked by grey boulders beneath which yellow toadstools nestled, whilst under the September mists the white mushroom was wont to peep out in the fairy rings. High upon the right crest, an old *rath* or fort, or, as it was called by the peasants, the place of the "good people," showed its green mounds. Some said that under the full moon one could hear the fairy music or even see the little people disporting themselves if one had "the sight," but others said that it was but the tinkle of the streamlet below.

They had passed in silence through the valley by the sea by way of the narrow footpath that ran along the stream and had come out into the wooded, bird-haunted country beyond, remote from the presence of man as are the places of God.

Now they were in a *boreen* that wound secretly between its bramble-hung walls, against the lichened stones of which the red veinery of the stems clustered in the softness of the April afternoon. The nut trees filtered a tracery of sunlight upon the grass-grown furrows of evening, across which sleuthed a weasel-shape of thin wickedness that seemed to pass into the heap of stones where the wall had crumbled in upon itself, whilst from the hawthorn, now breaking in the buds of spring, a blackbird flew, shrieking.

The boreen twisted itself a little and Finn found himself looking through the high gates of rusted iron that swung loosely from the stark pillars of limewashed stone which sentinelled the cobbles of the ancient courtyard, about three sides of which the long low building nestled.

They stood on the hither side of the gate, 'prisoned by the shadows of the towering elms that leant themselves over the stables which formed the left and back of the house, to quarter the westering sun into golden blotches upon the mossy cobbles. The windless shadows lay heavy on the stones. In one corner, an elderberry hung its grey stems in lonely friend-

liness. The greenhearted panes of the glass verandah which to the right ran the full length of the dwelling itself, glowed dully with red fire.

The gate sang its lullaby as they passed through and crossed the yard. The empty stables on the left, their yellow walls stained by time, showed doorless—square black sepulchres of emptiness from which came no low of cattle or whinny of horse. The jagged shaft of a wheelless cart pointed brokenly upwards.

As they came to the door in the centre of the verandah, over which the broken bell-pull swung desolately, the girl had held up her hand with a little warning gesture, in it something of solemnity, and so Finn had peered through the glass of the verandah and the open door inside into the room beyond.

It was then he saw the old lady kneeling over her beads to face the sun now setting behind the lonely stems of the ash grove which showed themselves through the long window on the other side of the house. Behind her, where a fire of peats burned low under the glow of the April sun, a little boy leant his head in the corner of the open chimney-place, as though it were too heavy. As he looked, a wrinkled hand went up to the bowed head and made the sign of the cross. The old woman, a figure of a lofty fineness, stood up, seemed to feel their presence, and turned to them with a gracious beckoning gesture.

"Ah, 'tis you, is it alannah?" she said to Deirdre as she came towards her, the lips compressed as with pain, the grey eyes with the loving hopeless look that printed itself upon Finn's memory for ever.

She had turned to him, in her gracious way.

"And you'll be Mr. Fontaine," she said. "Welcome to the House of Dreams, Mr. Fontaine!"

She smiled a little to him.

## XVI

“AND THE GATES OF HELL. . . .”

For something over a year, Finn travelled backwards and forwards between London and Dunhallow in connection with the Black Rock scheme, which, however, had been considerably delayed by Crux's enforced absence in the United States, where he was arranging one of his financial combinations and also getting support for an ultimate Anglo-American company for the exploitation of Irish industries, of which Black Rock was to be the first.

During that year, the gaunt spreading boy had been knitting together both in mind and body. He no longer looked as though he were growing out of his clothes, and the lines of the face were more assured, whilst, with the tumult behind beginning to find its outlet through more ordered channels, the physical features seemed to be settling into relation one with the other.

And yet there was trouble in the face—the trouble that had come to adolescence in the presence of a beautiful woman whose distant watchfulness was fast changing into something closer, more intimate. For the girl who had kissed him was no longer immobile. She had begun the spoiling.

Deirdre Asthar he had seen fleetingly during his stays in the House of Dreams, and once in London, a day when he had visited her brother at his house and when she had passed him in the hall with a nod of indifference. It had given him one of those little chills to which he was now accustomed, for from that moment of the sick child by the roadside she had held herself towards him in haughty aloofness, and he, sensitively proud, had been hurt into anger. But to Mrs. O'Hara and Patsey, and always to Paris, with that strange close bond that united them, she could be warmly loving, though always wilful, whilst to the people of Black Rock, who had known her from childhood and who had taught her the Irish, she

was a sort of earthly vicaress to the Blessed Mother herself.

On one of his visits he had heard of her in a strange connection. It was said that she had begun to gather the boys and girls of Black Rock around her in an old disused school-house where she would tell them the story of Ireland and sing to them the songs of Ireland. And he thought of what she had said to him that day about Internationalism and of how Ireland was more to her than the whole world. Mrs. O'Hara herself had told him that as a child Deirdre had had many childish quarrels with her father about Ireland and that the people used to call her "the little patriot." But when she had gone to London, all this seemed to have been submerged by her new associations.

Everything about Deirdre Asthar had the property of affecting Finn strongly and this thing was no exception. It impressed him disagreeably. Things, slight in themselves, could, when touched by this girl, assume an irritating and ridiculous significance. In bed at night, his mind would seize upon some trifle in connection with her, upon which, his imagination working, he would find himself in a fever.

In London he had been haunting all sorts of meetings at which the rising faith of Internationalism was being preached. To him, Internationalism and Nationality were of necessity two opposites. The path to this nebulous Internationalism lay over the corpse of Nationality. It began to come to him that Nationality and Internationalism were two world-faiths, the older and the newer, each with its priests and devotees, their tenets, not argued, but *preached*. They were not politics, but religion.

It flashed upon him, as something incredible, that perhaps everything was religion—and passed again.

Yet he would sometimes find Ireland calling to him as to a long-lost child—and in those moments Internationalism seemed very far away. And all this, in some way not clear, was bound up with Deirdre Asthar.

Finn could not fathom this girl of contrariness and at times could hate her very sincerely. Mrs. O'Hara would sometimes look from one to the other, the lips compressed, a light of humour and pain in the tender hopeless eyes, and that also irritated Finn.

During his first stay with Mrs. O'Hara, she had flitted in



and out of the house like a shadow and sometimes he would hear the sound of her lute and the full dark notes coming from her room or from the ashgrove outside, where, amongst the grey stems, she loved to sit and play. And once he had been witness of a queer little scene after she had sung Yeats' "Hosting of the Sidhe:"

The host is riding from Knocknarea,  
And over the grave of Clooth-na-bare;  
Caolte tossing his burning hair,  
And Niamh calling "Away, come away!"  
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.  
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,  
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,  
Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a-gleam,  
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart. . . .  
The host is rushing 'twixt night and day;  
And where is there hope or deed as fair?  
Caolte tossing his burning hair,  
And Niamh calling, "Away, come away!"

As she sat there in the April night, she seemed herself a creature of the gloaming. Beneath the stuff of her dress that had the texture of a grey wrinkled leaf, the little rounded breasts heaved, the eyes gleamed, and when she had finished with lips parted, the eyes, with something of the night in them looked out through the ashen stems into the glow where the sun slept.

Little Patsey, his head heavy with dreams, had been listening to the song in the shadow of the house, his arm around the neck of his white calf, into the ears of which he whispered like some necromancer, his grey eyes opening out to watch the singer. Then had come that breaking of the spell. Her lips had shut, her eyes had dropped back into the world from the faraway, and she had turned to the boy who was looking at her with parted eyes and lips: "But you know, Patsey boy, there are no fairies. It's only a song."

The boy had looked on her with wondering reproach as he pressed the white neck of the calf more closely: "Oh, Miss Deirdre, 'tis joking that ye are. Sure the whole world knows that 'the good people' are as real as ourselves. Didn't I see a *cluricaune* once down there by the stream, mending

his brogues under the shadow of a foxglove? No fairies!" He gave one of his little weird laughs.

And the evening before he left for London. He remembered that. For the grey-eyed woman that seemed to mother all things about her, whether they went on two feet or four, had also mothered the strange boy who had come under her roof. A bond had grown between them that might have been that of mother and son if there had not also been in it a strangeness of romance—for sometimes when he would be looking into the steadfast eyes under their serene brows it would seem to him for a moment that he was looking into the eyes of a beautiful young girl whom he had known in some far off place and time.

Mrs. O'Hara that June evening had been seated before the turf fire in the kitchen turning the wooden wheel of the blower in the fire-shadows. Patsey sat in the corner, listening to the cluckety-cluck of the wheel and drowsing at the fire as it blew up in little fountains of sparks, for summer or winter he loved to sit there. The old kitchen with the naked rafters and the little wooden ladder leading to the "loft" was full of strange shadows that danced under the gleam of the flames. It was then that Mrs. O'Hara seated on the little three-cornered stool told Finn and Patsey, under the pulsing of the wheel, about the shadows.

"Sure, aren't they my friends?" she had said. "Aren't they company for me in the long nights of winter and in the summer twilights? And don't they bring things in with them to sit there forninst me—I that have lost my childer and my man and that have only Patsey left? . . . and Deirdre, of course," she had said after a moment, ". . . and Finn," she added after another little moment, bending her head to look tenderly on the boy. Even as she had spoken, there came the sound of the lute from the outside of the house and the voice of the singer:

. . . . Come, dear heart, where the shadows creep  
To the twilight edge of to-morrow's sleep.  
Come, dear heart, where the shadows fly  
Over the faint of the western sky.  
Come, dear heart, on the shadows' flight  
As we whisper together the last good-night. . . ."

It came back to him—that evening at "The Cloisters," and the slim fine shoulders of the singer under the shaded lights.

These were the things that were passing through his mind as he sat over his breakfast in Ash Villa one morning of early September. He had been reading "The Earth," which had now sent out a trumpet call for Thrum's new Imperial Crusade. Not a single call, but rather a series of blasts which had been headed "Wake up England!" and which looked like deafening even Thrum's public, now used to megaphonic announcements.

The new crusade was being preached as fanatically as ever Peter the Hermit had preached the original. Its object, as it avowed with simple directness, was "to paint the map red." According to "The Earth," nobody knew or apparently cared how the Empire had grown. Now, every child in the school was to be taught that as a matter of religion; and, after that, taught to shoot. In the new Crusade, as in the old, slaughter and religion appeared in some way to be interchangeable terms. There was but one cure for the troubles of the world: a dose of Empire plus a dose of grape.

And it *was* a Crusade. It was all very well for the opposing and usually unsuccessful papers to talk about Thrum as "the mad Imperialist." Thrum at least spoke with conviction and with passion—imperial passion.

The call to empire had drowned everything, including a new battle between Sir Lancaster Hogge and Sir Raymond Hilary, which had broken out in spite of every effort by the editor of "The Earth" to stop it, and which, dislodged at last from its columns, they had continued from paper to paper in a series of skirmishes into which Professor Dust, as usual, had butted with a perfect trail of trematodes wriggling in his wake, whilst the Bishop of Whitechapel, at first timorous on the brink, had finally been drawn into this terrible circle as a boat is drawn into a whirlpool. The public at that moment being more nearly concerned for their stomachs, which were empty, than for their souls, of which they were scarcely conscious, had quickly lost interest in the battle, which, owing to the eminence of the contestants, no editor had the courage to stop.

The whole thing might have dragged on indefinitely had it not been for one editor, more knowing than the rest, inviting

Professor Dust to contribute his views upon the latest refutation of the Darwinian theory upon environment, which instantly had drawn Professor Hogge and so sidetracked the main discussion.

On the heels of this rout Lanthorn had hung, snapping, now here, now there, choosing his bites with shrewd judgment. The other combatants fought shy as far as possible of a man who seemed to be conducting a sort of ghostly post-office and doing it so practically and effectively that it seemed difficult to disprove his assertions. But, as Sir Lancaster Hogge said: "a Borderland Bureau was a bit too thick." Sir Lancaster was showing a steady tendency to offensiveness as he got older and he had been having a bad time lately with Dust upon "variation."

As a sort of tin whistle after all this pother, came a tootle, obviously heavily pruned from what had originally been the blast of a trombone, from Uncle Bobs upon rice as an Imperial Food. (The capitals were his.) There were some involved statistics showing Japan's climb to power on rice, and in the gaps Finn could read "nuts, onions, and water." As it was, his uncle had managed to get in "Nature, Sir, Nature!" three times. Bobs was a terrible imperialist.

Finn, reading these things, felt that sense of unreality which had crept upon him during the preceding year. In some obscure way, Ireland made all these things seem futile. Not only had they no power to beat their way through that invisible barrier which seemed to envelop the island and hold it virginal to the great world, but the island itself seemingly had the power to invest those who visited it with a sort of unresponsiveness to these assaults of the great world outside. Father Con had once said to him: "All the world lies outside Ireland—and Ireland outside the world."

To all this unreality came Crux with the next link in his scheme—the proselytisation of Black Rock, which Finn was now again about to visit.

The Reverend Slick, "the Yankee patent priest" as he had been invidiously called by some disgruntled and probably unsuccessful clergyman of orthodoxy, had been holding expensive Primitive Christian *séances* (the word used by the disgruntled one) in the Great Rotunda in Kensington each Sunday, being especially strong on Revelation and the coming

of a world-war. His arguments were punctuated by horned beasts and colour-splashed by the Scarlet Woman, whose garments of sin fluttered themselves through his more excited periods. With considerable dexterity he had managed to fasten the more doubtful qualities both of the animals and the lady upon his opponents. There was no doubt about his success. Thousands had to be turned away at what the disgruntled critic had called "each performance," and he was already being hailed by men and women throughout the metropolis as a Prince of Revelation. The clean-shaven upper lip and fringe of beard began to appear in the Sunday newspapers, and very nice things had been said about their owner in exalted quarters.

He had made what he himself called in his page advertisements now filling "The Earth" and other newspapers, "a special line," by dealing with modern commerce, more particularly upon its gargantuan sides, calling it "the new Revelation of our times." "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's . . ." was one of his favourite texts, and Crux himself had initiated what was becoming quite a fashionable habit with employers, who sent their clerks to the Great Rotunda where seats were reserved for them. All seats were free and it was reported that Crux held the purse-strings.

But one thing had come to Finn to puzzle him—the fact that even the Reverend Elias Z. Slick had begun to preach upon wars and rumours of wars. This was to him one of those strange linkings of opposites. Father Con had spoken of God getting mad if Europe persisted in her materialism and of his sending a great war to wipe it out. He had heard Paris Asthar making some such reference also. Father Lestrangle had frequently spoken of it—and even his father, who seemed to derive much comfort from it, in that dim religious way of his, had talked vaguely of "a great war to destroy the ungodly." And now, a man utterly unlike all these, Slick himself, was talking on the same lines.

When he reached Black Rock in the September evening, the dying sun was sending its dull tawn across the gently heaving tides, which seemed to breathe under the orange moon looming in the sky as on that evening when he had first come to Dunhallow. Out on the edge of the horizon hung a solitary fishing boat as though it slid on the edge of the world.



Above him, the ruined walls of the old chapel looked out over the seas. It might have stood there from the days when mortality had not yet separated from the immortality that was its mother and when mortals and immortals still communed together.

And then, inconsequent, the Reverend Slick's broad-brimmed hat, hard calculating mouth and square-cut frock-coat came sailing into all this.

Finn wondered what Black Rock would do with this incursion from the twentieth century. Would it throw him over Carrickmore or take him out there into the illimitable and leave him in it, or would it simply ignore him?

Black Rock was civil to patent theology as it would have been civil to the Devil himself had he chosen to walk up its only street with sufficient discretion to leave his horns and hoofs at home—or at least to clothe his nether extremities in trousers and his horns in the silk hat of respectability. Black Rock was simple and pastoral, but Black Rock—it was one of Finn's shocks—in spite of its contempt for the things of this world had no contempt for money. It would take a man's money and thank him—but it was incorruptible. Money could not buy the heart of the Black Rock Turks. Father Con had said to him: "Ah, 'tis Father Hennessey or something that has spoiled them. Sure they'd sell anything they had for money except their souls or their honour."

And so, when the Reverend Slick, shrewd-eyed and hard but not close-fisted, asked Black Rock to build the tabernacle of the new theology which was to challenge and finally overcome that of the old, standing up there on Carrickmore—Black Rock responded with secret gladness. And when the red bricks were dumped by special ship at the foot of Carrickmore, all the labourers and masons of that part of the country came forward to unload them and to put them in place. And when the reverend gentleman, challenging the primeval with the primitive, chose the site for the new church upon a rocky point a few hundred yards away from and a few hundred feet below the steepness of the old rock, Black Rock never quibbled but set to work with a will and whiskied and feasted for many days thereafter.

The Reverend Slick rubbed his hands in secret. Where he had expected opposition there was no opposition—only will-



ing work. Money, under God of course, ruled the world. And so the reverend gentleman gloated. He had never had a failure either with the things of this world or with those of the world to come.

And with these things of the next world were going the things of this. Already, below, the new pier was forming itself out of the uneasy seas, whilst a space had been cleared by the water's edge and on it was being built the first of the fish-curing stations. Black Rock, miserably poor, had never seen so much money before, except on those odd occasions when one of its sons or daughters returning from America in the plumes and broadcloth of civilisation, had given it an infrequent taste of the root of all evil. What with the necessity of housing new workmen, and the new wages, Mr. Higgins looked like becoming in the fulness of time the *gombeen* king of Ireland. He could be seen at all hours of the day and night, the nose hooking itself out beak-like from between the little stinging eyes, exhorting: "Come now, Mickey, quick there with the car for his honour!" or "Kitty—for God's sake don't burn Mr. Busby's bacon, or I'll lambast you!" The public house was filled to the doors and there had been some very free fights and much drunkenness. Old Biddy Moriarty, who ought to have known better, had even appeared one Sunday morning outside the chapel with a bottle of whiskey in the hanging pocket under her red flannel petticoat, which she raised both conspicuously and frequently.

Father Hennessey was blooming. On Sundays he held forth upon the dangers of strong drink, but as he always finished up with the duties of hospitality from the standpoint of faith and morals, of which he was always talking, in connection with the stranger within the gate, it rather weakened his exhortation.

Black Rock, in fact, began to get quite a name in the surrounding country. From a place which at one time had scarcely been visited or spoken of, it had come to be regarded as a rather uproarious little hell where "dhrink, divilment and divarsion" was the order of the day—and night. Parties of young bloods from Dunhallow were in the habit of riding out on their bicycles in the evenings to share in the general festivities and Mr. Higgins' whiskey, but the Black-rockers, with strong local sense, soon stopped that by beating

half a dozen of them into unconsciousness and depositing them outside the village bounds. The Reverend Slick was *their* meat.

What the Reverend Elias Z. Slick thought of all this, he did not say. Possibly he viewed it with an indulgent eye as proof positive of the need of the new church and as perhaps a necessary preparation, for, as he often said: "the ways of God are past finding out."

It was on this high note of feasting and revelry that the opening of the new church was announced exactly thirteen months from that September evening when Finn, now in his twenty-second year, had arrived in Black Rock, unwilling herald of Primitive Christianity and proselytisation. It was to take place in the evening. There was to be a service of the lightest possible nature with the new patent imported organist to play upon the patent American organ which had also been imported. And after the service there were to be the loaves and fishes which had worked such wonders in Limehouse.

Finn made his way upon this tempestuous evening of late autumn from the House of Dreams up to the red brick tabernacle. The rain blew down in southing gusts from the sides of Croagh Cromlech under the winnow of the south-west wind. The boreen was running ankle-deep in water, the stones shining under the moisture. Something cried and flew across the boreen, almost brushing his face, upon which he could feel the beat of wings—some nightbird which had been driven by weather stress into the lower branches of the hawthorn—the ghost of that bird of nearly two years ago. Above his head, he could hear the groaning of the elms as they ground together.

A foxglove here and there hung melancholy over the stream as he walked along it, and so he came out of the valley to make his way slowly up to the tabernacle gleaming bright and new in flaring contrast to the old ruined chapel upon the brow of the headland above.

The road and the new gravel way up to the building showed no signs of life, and as he entered the church, well-warmed and garnished, and in the porch saw, displayed upon tables, the loaves and fishes, he wondered. He passed into the building to find there Busby, the engineer, and four or five of the English workmen who had not yet gone back to England.

For all its varnish and garnish the place had the desolation

of new buildings. He took his seat in the silence, which was broken by the organ grinding out one of the most successful of the Reverend Slick's hymns, with that touch of the music-hall which, hovering on the edge of cheerfulness, stopped short at ribaldry. In it was something brazen—in it something of those great steam-driven motor organs of the roundabouts.

He played and stopped. And again he played. It was past the hour of opening. The church doors gaped emptily towards the village.

The Reverend Slick, his brows black as the skies outside, appeared and gave his address. He spoke, challengingly, from the text: "And upon this rock will I build my church. . . ." He told the handful of the faithful that this was only the beginning. The church had been built upon this rock in this pagan country and there it would stay. He repeated: "And upon this rock will I build my church . . . ." pausing as though waiting for someone to take up his challenge. It came.

A ribald laugh from Lanty, the village idiot, who had stolen in unobserved and who now ran out into the grey emptiness. They could hear the laugh irrepressible break out again and again in the distance as he ran down the hill to tell the village about "that quare ould fellow up there and his funny God."

After the service, the Reverend Slick, old warhorse of a hundred fights, a terrible figure of a man, determined to go through with what he had begun, waiting there implacable by the side of the groaning tables. He looked down through the doors into the village, in the purple shadows of which the lights began to shine.

As Finn passed the shrine of the old faith crouching up there under evening skies from which all storm had passed, its ruined walls stark against the faintest starshine of the purple night, its windows, throwing back the sun sinking beneath the rim of the ocean, seemed to burst into flame. It crouched there, looking out into the centuries, empty but assured. ". . . and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

He walked down the hill into the gathering night.

## XVII

### GHOST-HUNTING

Dunhallow was discursive. In its eleven centuries of existence it had not been so moved, not even when Sigurd the Dane, a thousand years before, had sailed past Carrickmore, skirted the hidden menace of the Irons, and stood into the middle circle of the triple callipers to harry and finally to marry the maidenhood of Dunhallow.

For Paris Asthar had come to Dunhallow, accompanied by a beautiful young woman with hair like beaten copper, and attended by a gnome in yellow ivory of some inferior world who was supposed to answer to the name of Togo but who did not, because, so far as Dunhallow knew, he was speechless. Dunhallow, with its passion for baptism, christened him "The Master of the Toilet."

So far as Dunhallow could see, Paris Asthar lived for his toilet. He did not abate one hair of his Piccadilly presentment but strolled round the little town magnificent in shining silk hat, frock-coat, and malacca, followed by crowds of beggars headed by Johnny the Saint, who seemed to sprout from the earth at his passage, and distributing *largesse* like a prince of the blood. The children, who adored him, executed various feints and devices to draw him into Miss Bluett's the confectioner's, whence he would issue with Togo at his heels carrying two large tissue paper bags of Miss Bluett's bullseyes, weather-stained, very strong, very yellow, and very satisfying.

Old Asthar of the grey stone house at the top of the square, Dunhallow of course knew well, as his eccentricities and grudging munificence. But Paris was a new and better edition.

It was true that, unlike his half-sister, who was the only child of old Asthar by his second marriage, and beloved of Dunhallow, he had never before been to Ireland, hugging London and the continental cities, and it was also true that

his appearance was nearly as foreign as that of his attendant. But he had the irresistible Irish blood in him—Dunhallow could see that—a touch of the brogue that was beginning to haunt the high, trumpet-like tones like the call of memory, and when, finally, heretic though Dunhallow believed him to be, for in Ireland if a man is not a Catholic he must of necessity be a Protestant, he made his way to the Big Chapel at the top of the street of William and Mary, popularly known as "The Street of the Gallows," and said his prayers there, Dunhallow capitulated. As Paris himself said: "My God can be worshipped anywhere."

Finn, who was at this time more or less permanently in Dunhallow watching Crux's interests at Black Rock at a wage that was a trifle less than one of Crux's masons, met Asthar on his arrival one wet evening of October and brought him to his friend, Father Con, to whom Asthar gravely confessed that he had come to Dunhallow ghost-hunting, addressing the reverend gentleman, apparently in virtue of his position, as "the-ghost-finder-in-chief." To "Kitty the Divil," he instantly made love. The little thing was perplexed, flattered, and not a little frightened, for, as she said in apology for her sex's weakness—"he is a beautiful divil." However, he conducted his wooing with such an air of propriety that even Father Con could only pretend to be shocked. For the Father had also capitulated.

Dunhallow's only difficulty was Stella Fay. It had also been that of Father Con and his housekeeper. Dunhallow had developed such a moral sensitiveness, resulting from a national concentration through the centuries, that the spectacle of a beautiful young woman with hair of copper travelling with what Dunhallow called "a beautiful man" and staying with him under the same roof, invited consideration. Miss O'Shaughnessy at "The Shamrock of Ireland," a very proper virgin in the fifties, had been in two minds about taking them in (the big house in the square was at present uninhabitable), but within the space of two sentences had surrendered bag and baggage, that is to say "faith and morals," to the distinguished stranger, whose father had been one of her best friends and who now was her landlord. And besides, hadn't Father Con opposite made them free of the hearth of holiness?



And who should she be to be questioning the judgment of the parish priest?

"Maybe the young lady is a cousin or something, yer honour?" she had said, wheedling-like. She was despairingly anxious to make it easy for him and for her conscience.

"No, no, my dear madam," replied her guest, "Miss Fay is only a comrade." Dunhallow had never heard the word and took it to express a sort of relation, and Paris and Stella on trust—a trust which was not betrayed, for even Dunhallow could see in a little while that the friendship of these two had nothing more of sex in it than the friendship of Father Con and his housekeeper.

One of those afternoons of late autumn when the gracious lady that is Ireland had strewed the green of her robes with brown and gold, Finn was walking down the boreen near the valley, when just where the narrow lane turned under the reddened hawthorn, he saw a figure coming towards him through the golden shadows. It was a curious whip-like figure clad in a tawny brown which blended with the leaves around, and in its hand it swung a green leather cap, leaving the copper hair above to glow softly under the last rays of the sun as though it were on fire. With that limping swiftness, it was on him like a shadow before he could collect himself.

It sidled over to the boy and looked up slyly as it stood under the lee of one of his great shoulders. Then it laughed, a little full throaty laugh.

And then Stella Fay had slipped one little warm hand along his arm, leaving it to rest in the crook of his elbow, confidently.

"I have come to see you . . . Finn," she added after a little pause, using his Christian name for the first time. She stole a look upwards at him, the boy standing there confused and bareheaded, for he had got into the way of going hatless.

"You know I thought you were a *loup-garou*, with that great mop of hair standing back against the evening sky. "Now I am done for," I said. She laughed a little delicious laugh. "He will eat me up alive, this great monster of the twilight. . . . *Will* you eat me?" She looked at him provokingly and pressed his arm ever so little.

He felt ridiculous. The girl with the copper hair had always



made him feel a little ridiculous—but yet satisfied. Not like Deirdre Asthar, who never made him ridiculous—only contemptible. For the life of him he could not speak, but stood there with the sweat starting out where the thicket of his hair met his forehead. The perfume of the girl's body, evanescent, seemed to pass through him. He had, as always, a consciousness of the warmth of her body with its penetration. The chill of the autumn air only seemed to quicken this almost painful consciousness of her physical presence.

"Don't be afraid," she went on. "I'm not going to eat you . . . or to kiss you. Next time, it is you who shall kiss me . . . if I will. . . Perhaps I won't." She laughed again.

They had met a few yards from where the boreen twisted sharply. Finn, looking over the beautiful head, saw another figure in the deepening shadows at the turning. He sprang away from the girl, who started, and then there came that little characteristic frown between the eyes which Finn knew so well as she saw Deirdre Asthar coming towards them.

Had she seen them? He had nothing of which to be ashamed, but in Stella Fay's company he always had an apprehension of guilt, of uneasiness. But the evening was dark and the great hawthorn had shadowed them. Only he flushed heavily as he saw the starry eyes of the girl look first at him and then at Stella Fay.

"How are you, Deirdre?" the girl asked with a little smooth laugh. "You see I've come over with Paris as we promised. We're ghost-hunting and are coming to stay at your House of Dreams."

Deirdre was as always self-possessed. It was one of the things that irritated Finn. She shook hands with the other girl, but to Finn it came as the salute of two rapier players before they engage. She made some indifferent reply and the three walked up to the house, Deirdre leaving them as they entered the swinging gates.

Mrs. O'Hara stood in the door to receive them. She looked in that shrewd searching way at Stella Fay, the eyes hardened a trifle and then lit up in the way which Finn knew. For at the same moment the girl had gone up to her in that frank boyish way she so often showed to women and had

put up one slender arm to draw to her the white head which she kissed.

"I know all about you, Mrs. O'Hara, from Mr. Fontaine, who has been deafening us with your praises over there—" she swept a free arm out behind her. "You know, my mother died when I was born—she was partly French and partly Irish," she whispered half in pleading half in apology for her caress as she snuggled her well-formed compact head against the shoulder of the woman before her.

The soft firm arm stole up behind her and caressed the hair, once, twice, and pressed the head to her breast. And then she had taken them into the house.

Paris came during the evening, driving magnificently upon a side-car up a boreen where no such thing had ever before rolled and expanding upon the beauties of the sunset to Johnny the Saint, whose coat-tail as usual was hanging over the wheel at the rear. He was followed by a pack animal, one of the donkeys which shared Black Rock with its humans, piled high with trunks and bags under which it nearly disappeared though urged on from the rear by Lanty, the idiot boy. Togo perched before Johnny and, wrapped to the nose in a shawl like a little yellow ape, showed to a strange world two carraway seeds of eyes which saw everything and nothing.

Togo performing his usual magic, they were installed by ten o'clock, a great fire burning in Asthar's bedroom as in that of Stella Fay, the trunks and bags unpacked, and Togo himself stowed away in the loft in a biscuit crate in which, when little Patsey for purposes of his own went to look at him in the dawn of the next morning, he looked like a doll in a coffin.

To Finn's surprise, things had gone smoothly. He did not know why he had expected trouble, but, although he had never seen them quarrel, it had always seemed to him that there was something of secret antagonism between Deirdre and Stella. It seemed to him, innocent though he was, that Deirdre in some hidden way was always watching the other girl. He would sometimes catch that strange veiled glance that puzzled him. But what was there to watch?

Deirdre, in these days when Paris and Stella went what they called "ghost-hunting" in the hills and raths where their shadows were always frightening belated countrymen, was

terribly wilful. Even to Mrs. O'Hara she was at times irritable, though afterwards she would always go up to her and kiss her warmly, secretly. And sometimes she would sit on the floor and rest the bronzed tangle of her hair in the lap of the white-haired woman as she sat turning the blower softly on the little three-legged stool in the kitchen, where they all liked to come in the evenings.

To Finn it was as though Stella also watched the other, although he had never once caught a glance from her. She had a habit of curling that snaky body of hers into dark corners from where they would see the glowing tip of her cigarette as it came and went, and though Finn could not see the eyes, he could feel them—those grey black-centred eyes, and the swelling nostrils, and the red lips with the slender scented cigarette hanging between them. Mrs. O'Hara, who seemed to understand all things, did not protest at the cigarettes, although Black Rock, which had surrendered to "The Girl with the Burning Hair," as it called her in the Irish, until her advent had no doubts upon the immorality of feminine smoking, except in the form of a black cutty as the solace of age. For Black Rock, which knew men and women by some quality rather than by name had baptised Stella Fay after their beloved Caolte, the chief of the fairies, whose hair seemed to flame on his head as he rode across the hedges and ditches in the dusk of the crescent moon.

And then, one evening when Paris, now in a soft wide-awake in which he looked inexpressibly bizarre, like some Assyrian bandit who had fallen into the twentieth century, had returned from the old fort on the hill with Stella, the storm broke.

Stella had the way of speaking about her ghosts and creepinesses as though they were real creatures of flesh and blood which all the world acknowledged. This evening, after she had bathed and dressed—for summer and winter she swam in green waters whenever she got the chance, astonishing by her feats a people who, fearless on the water, would no more have thought of bathing in it than of bathing in fire—she lay full length before the lighted turf upon a rug made of the skins of seals which once had gambolled in the cove below. In a dress of some shining green stuff, she looked like some

sinuous creature, half mortal, half mermaid, who had come up from the depths to lie on the hearths of men.

"Ellen Masters," she said irrelevantly. "She told us to come to Ireland for our ghost-hunting—she said that Ireland was a spirit-haunted land. She is an Irishwoman herself. She knows every spirit 'twixt here and India. She was telling us one day how she first became a Universalist. She had been a terrible unbeliever and had been writing for those dreadful Rationalist Thinkers . . . ." and so Stella Fay had wandered into the story of the famous Universalist leader's conversion.

Paris Asthar listened with that large indulgence which was his own. Mrs. O'Hara turned the wheel softly. Little Patsey dreamed of God knows what in the corner. But Deirdre on the other side of the fire, tautened.

"Universalism," she said. "That is nonsense." There was a finality about the utterance that was irritating—perhaps meant to be so.

The girl on the sealskins flashed a glance at her. Finn caught it as it passed like a weaver's shuttle.

"You know," she continued, "no intelligent man or woman could really believe in those silly stories of saints and devils and angels. There are no such things. Or, if there are," she went on, a trifle illogical, "the people who pretend to worship them have made them ridiculous. That sort of thing is a cult—the Ellen Masters cult. A cult of short-haired women and long-haired men. . . ."

"I thought you had short hair, dear," said the girl on the sealskins, lazily.

Deirdre ignored her. "All these things are cults with labels. They even try to label the Almighty and put him up in bottles. These people are merely ridiculous. They know nothing of life. They know nothing of reality. Warm flesh and red blood and star-dust—those are the real things of living."

"Do you know much about life?" asked the other girl. "I thought you prided yourself upon not knowing anything about reality."

Paris chuckled. "Got you there, Deirdre," he said, with splendid male detachment.

"Such things," said Deirdre, losing her temper a little, "are

no more real than, than . . . . than Patsey's fairies . . . . " and she smiled a little to the boy.

To Finn it seemed on a par with all those other contradictions inherent in existence. Deirdre, he should have expected to be the Universalist, and the poisonous sneering girl on the rug, the sceptic. To him, Deirdre Asthar always sneered at everything religious whilst Stella Fay was ardent, almost excessive, in her expression of religious feelings. He felt himself with Stella Fay, for Ireland had been doing her work on him, driving him away from his materialism or, rather, dissolving it. And yet Deirdre, in some queer, elusive way, seemed to have the heart of things. There were things in life he could not reconcile.

There was for example that patriotism of Deirdre's which seemed to burn with a lambent flame that made it a faith, whilst Stella Fay sneered at all love of country. She said her country was the men and women throughout the world who cared for the things that she cared for, and once Paris Asthar had interfered to say that life was tending more and more to divide itself, not by race, not by religion, but by class. That was indeed what the Reverend John Durring and Jock MacAdam had also said, but Asthar hated Socialism, at which he laughed good-humouredly.

More and more it seemed to Finn that people were always saying the same thing in different words as though some spirit of synthesis were at work in the world to reconcile the irreconcilable.

But Asthar, lolling luxuriously upon an old settle over which Togo, flitting in and out, had thrown a splendid bearskin rug, looking on half-cynical and half-amused at a struggle in which two invisible antagonists seemed to be grappling, glanced across at little Patsey.

"Do you hear that, Patsey?" he asked challengingly.

"Hear what, Mr. Asthar?" asked the boy.

"Why, here's Miss Deirdre telling Miss Fay that her spirits have no more existence than your fairies."

The boy looked wonderingly at the big man.

"Sure there are good spirits and bad spirits," he said. "Doesn't everyone know that? I don't know Miss Stella's spirits. Maybe they're the bad. . . ." He looked so pen-



estratingly at the girl that Paris gave vent to a shout of laughter.

"And what are mine," he asked patronisingly.

The little boy gazed at him with that far away look. "Faith I wouldn't be surprised if they were queer hairy scaly divils with horns and a tail," he said, solemnly. "There are two kinds—the smooth wans and the scaly wans."

"And what are 'the good people,' Patsey?" asked Stella.

"They're betwixt and between. Sure they're good and bad—they're very like us," he said wistfully. "Sure wan time they were human beings that thought they knew as much as spirits, till the wrath of God wouldn't let them live above the earth any longer—but by nights they do be rushin' out again like them Niamh and Caoilte that Miss Deirdre do be singin' of. 'Twas the pride of the head they had—they thought they knew everything by understanding it, until in the long last they didn't even believe in God—and that was why God punished them."

"But, Patsey, are there no others?" asked Stella.

"Indeed and there are. There are the angels of light—that do be hatin' and fightin' with the bad wans. They're my spirits," he added proudly.

"No, Patsey, they're not the best," said Paris Asthar with a strange little note of earnestness and hostility stealing into his voice. "The fairies are the best. Wouldn't you rather ride down the wind with Niamh calling 'Come-away!' and with Caoilte of the Burning Hair over the hills and valleys, peeping into the hearts of men and perhaps stealing away their souls, than be up there flying about doing nothing except playing on harps?" He lifted himself a trifle to look at the boy.

"Indeed and I wouldn't," said Patsey. "I love 'the good people,' only . . ." he paused a little doubtful, "only they'll only live a thousand years they do be sayin'—but . . . but. . . Maybe they also can get to heaven." He turned his eyes wistful towards Mrs. O'Hara. "Don't you think so, Granny? . . . I do be sorry for them and I do be sayin' prayers for them."

"That's true for the child," interposed Mrs. O'Hara. "He has always the queer fancies and has always said his prayers for 'the good people' since he was so high." She held her



hand out to measure. "Annie couldn't break him of it nor could Father Hennessey himself."

"Ah, Father Hennessey doesn't know anything about it," said the boy in an old-world voice that made them all laugh. "It is Father Con over there in Dunhallow that has the understanding. Fairies have souls." They saw him cross himself in the glow of the fire.

"Patsey," said Asthar lightly, "you ought to know my gods. They are fine fellows. They give money and power over men. They can give you a kingdom. . . ."

"Yes, maybe like the Divil showed our Blessed Lord when he took him up in the high mountain," said the child like a very old and cunning man. "And what would they be wantin' me to swop with them? Tell me that."

"They want nothing except yourself, Patsey," said Asthar, lifting himself still more. "They only ask whole-souled devotion—you give them your little self—they give you the big world." And now Asthar was curiously earnest, with Mrs. O'Hara looking hard at him.

"You can kape them, Mr. Asthar," said the boy, "for me. I'm in the hands of God."

"But God is over all," said Paris Asthar who now seemed to be joining issue with the little child before him, grappling with him. And to Finn, it seemed that up there the great shadows flickering on walls and ceiling were also grappling together. "God is the God of Power," he said.

"No, he isn't," said the child. "It is the God of Love that he is. . . ."

"That's a lie, Patsey," said the big man, who for the first time in Finn's knowledge seemed to show a vein of temper. It astonished him, as did the heavy folds which had seemed to come up under the fire-shadows on the smooth of the face as though the stuff behind were crumbling. But Stella was watching Asthar closely with that wild, slant-eyed look which gave to her something un-human.

"Ah, Mr. Asthar, 'tis ashamed of yourself you ought to be, tryin' to seduce the poor child," said Mrs. O'Hara half in fun and half in anger. "'Tis a way wid you ye have, but ye shan't get hold of Annie's Patsey."

"Oh, Mrs. O'Hara, don't be angry with me, please." The man lifted himself a little like a great cat and made a bow

to the old lady where she sat by the wheel. "Isn't it only a little bout of words we're havin' now." He put on the brogue in the way that he knew so well how to do, until it came mellifluous from his lips. She smiled up at him.

"What are your fairies like?" Paris asked.

But the boy would not answer him. He looked at him with wide-eyed, frightened suspicion. And in spite of all Paris Asthar's blandishments, he could not get him again to speak.

Deirdre through all this had sat silent in the old oak chair that was her favourite, her feet tucked up under her. Finn had been watching her. And it was torment to him. For every day that went he knew that this girl had got into his veins like a fire. It was since that day with little Pauden on the roadside. It was not when she had looked at him, but when the hair on her neck had parted to show the fair white skin beneath as she stooped over Pauden. He would have liked to think that it had come from her look—but it really came from that other thing.

It was not that he thought of her thinking of him. His feeling for her was such that even to tell her or to think of return made it nothing. If it were love—and it seemed to him sometimes to be hate or to hold hate in its heart—it was he told himself, only the love of a boy—with something of the stars in it.

For in a way, even, it had nothing to do with her, for he felt her remote as the stars themselves. But there was something about this girl that made him deeply, painfully conscious of himself—ashamed of his poverty, of the meanness of his clothes. Stella Fay never made him feel like that.

Looking at Stella, as she lay on the rug, she seemed to come between him and the girl in the chair like a shimmering veil that changed and dazzled. It made Deirdre Asthar remote—almost non-existent. To him, the girl on the rug, as he had discovered, was desire itself, with something unearthly, wild-eyed, but altogether desirably human as when spirits love mortals. Between her and that other girl there was a gulf intangible, something that could never be bridged.

His head filled with the fancies of hot passion as he looked, and then his eye lifted to catch a fleeting glance from Deirdre and for a great shame to come to him.

Finn, looking a trifle wide, caught something that flitted

across the shadows thrown from the flames. The little ivory face had seemed to catch a sudden blazing of the turf and at the same moment there flashed upon the boy's brain as though it had been photographed there, the grain carved on the ivory.

It was Togo going up to his coffin-bed in the loft above.

## XVIII

PAUDEEN

Through all this time Finn tried to write, but between the glowing cloud of his inspiration and the written page there waved fleetingly a strand of Stella's burnished hair, through the meshes of which Deirdre's green eyes, serene, assured, would sometimes search for him. More than ever was he like that bait in the deeps under Carrickmore torn hither and thither by desire and its opposite. But what was its opposite?

The process of consolidation which had been shaping the mind and body of Finn Fontaine seemed to have reached a period. He might go forward, but he might once more be flung into the melting pot of doubt as he had so often been before. Development, like all other things, had its method. Rearrangement seemed to be its law. Retrogression seemed to be an intrinsic of progress.

Not that he realised this consciously. The very condition of his evolution was partial unconsciousness. But down there in the unconscious deeps he was fighting upwards towards consciousness as drowning men fight upwards to the light—as he had been fighting since that June day at reading and prayer in the little room at Forestford when he had asked himself: "God? Who was God? *Was He?*"

Better an eternity of painful consciousness than the bestial sleep of dreamless extinction. He had heard there were people who desired such extinction as the end of life—he did not believe it—it seemed incredible, meaningless.

Unconscious though he was, he now knew, in some blind way, that consciousness was the thing for which he had to fight—that it was perhaps the whole end of life, that it was perhaps the supreme attribute of divinity. For the more he thought of it, the more life as it was lived about him came as a nightmare of unconsciousness and incoherency, without correlation or ultimate. The incoherency of Crux as of the people

at home—of the parish church parson as of the Bishop of Whitechapel—of the little mollusious middle-class of the Forestford suburb, which ebbed to and fro morning and evening to and from the city, with as much direction and consciousness of their environment and reason for existence as that shoal of jelly-fish he had once seen stream past the Black Rock pier—all this seemed to him the outstanding fact of life. But it never actively came to him that just because he himself was becoming conscious this was so.

At first he had believed as a matter of course that all these people about him were as much concerned about this thing as he and that somewhere or somehow they all had a secret philosophy of life, which to him was as much an essential of existence as heart or brain, though he did not call it "philosophy," he called it "a reason for life." Then he had tried to believe they had it, suppressing his own intuitions to the contrary. Finally, wavering between this belief and attempt to believe, he had reached the desolating conclusion that the great mass about him, even sometimes his dearest and best, were as blindly unconscious of any meaning underlying life and of their relation to it and to one another as the bats that hung in the belfry of the old chapel, for which the twilight was necessary to vision because they could not bear the light. And all this made him miserable—for it seemed to cut him off from his fellows.

This lack of continuity, of realisation, of logic—for it came to him as all three—appalled and irritated. It was always thrusting itself upon him and in a thousand ways. It was not only that his father left his religion behind him each day when he went upon his pilgrimages with the coals, about which he told, and conscientiously, any lie necessary to their sale—nor that Crux, despite the Church in the Fifth Avenue, trafficked just as conscientiously (he had to admit it) in flesh and blood in order to keep up his profits. It was in the sneer of a noble girl like Deirdre Asthar at the grey-faced army of hunger that day upon the Embankment as it lay in the contrast of the humanity of a Father Con and his indifference to the poverty about him. It showed itself in the great-hearted fishermen of Black Rock who, so tender to children, would put cruel loads upon their small donkeys and beat them unmercifully when they faltered, or on St. Stephen's Day when

they would kill a little wren for the pleasure of hanging it in a gaily-streamered bush.

Men, with that intense locality of the human being, pigeon-holed their consciences as their deeds, divorcing religion from action, politics from faith, business from belief, and, above all, the individual from the mass. Each seemed to be fighting blindly for himself. Crux fought for his profits. His father for his little house. The Bishop of Whitechapel for his Church. None of them fought for the world or realised themselves as citizens of that world. The world stood for them as an extra-ordinary phenomenon in which they had no share, into which they had been chance-flung.

It was not that he himself was always or altogether clear as to what this consciousness meant. But he knew it when he met it and the people who had it. His father and mother and aunts, as those little middle-class people in the houses of Forestford, as the Titterlings—all these belonged to the great army of the blind or unconscious. But Paris Asthar and Father Lestrangle had consciousness, as had Thrum and Lanthorn—each in his particular way. They had not all the same quality of consciousness, but they were “conscious.”

But Deirdre Asthar, for all her serenity and a certain distinctiveness which he thought of as nobility, was unconscious—Stella Fay, conscious. Some of the finest souls he had met, like Mrs. O'Hara and Patsey and Father Con—all these were of the unconscious. And all this again threw him into despair. Life apparently had no rules, although it had laws. Life was illogical. It was the worst thing he could say of it.

This consciousness might be circumscribed or it might be broad, but it always had the same distinguishing quality—the quality, not of assuredness—every Catholic in Black Rock was assured—which was a quality of faith, but of realisation and logic. The Jesuit, like Asthar, knew exactly his relation to the phenomena which surrounded him, though the realisation of each differed vitally from that of the other. But neither of these men were bait in deep waters, flashing blind, unconscious, from side to side under the urge of active determinative powers. They were themselves of these directing powers. Yet Crux directed, and yet he was as much a slave



to the machine of business and as unconscious of its meaning or end as any of the pound a week cogs in his offices.

Perhaps consciousness was the magic skein in the forest of life. A tiny, almost invisible, red cord which one might miss through a hundred existences and stumble upon blindly in one. But a cord that correlated everything, that showed the way and the meaning of the maze. Sometimes he had thought he had found it, had begun about it to construct his cosmos—which had then once more fallen to pieces under the impact of uncontrollable and unreasonable forces hurtling out of the unknown.

One thing alone kept him from ultimate despair—those strange exaltations which passed through him from some central universal power, filling him with an ecstasy to life as though some centre of dynamic-power were feeding him with vitality. He could almost say when he was in pulsing communication with this source of energy and when the communication was broken.

Not that Finn Fontaine was mystic or dreamer only. He could be very physical, with strong tastes in food and drink and exercise. And these exaltations could come to him at the most untoward moments, sometimes at the most ordinary moments—after a full meal as easily as when looking at the sunsets of calm seas under Carrickmore—under the incense of Stella Fay's physical presence as at the sight of the blue flame that sometimes burned in the eye of the girl who was her opposite.

And now these forces were at work upon his newly fledged logic. That day when the sunlight flashing through the mists upon the neck of the girl bending over little Paudeen had seemed to make all things plain—had brought Deirdre Asthar remotely near in one warm passionate moment of consciousness—and had left all things outside her unreal and non-existent. Then had come the day in the boreen when Stella Fay's hand laid upon his arm had seemed to burn itself into his veins . . . and that evening before the fire when Deirdre had surprised him in a moment when flesh and blood seemed the only real and the girl with the serene eyes remote as a solitary light upon lofty dusk-enshrouded battlements.

For these two girls stood for him dimly as the symbols for two opposite sets of forces, as they themselves were oppo-

site. Their opposition showed itself in a hundred ways, not only in such intangibilities as speech as in the more concrete things of aversion and expression. About Stella Fay there was something elemental, as in her love for losing herself in the green waters under Carrickmore—about Deirdre Asthar something adorably earthly and human as in her dread for those same waters which from childhood she had always feared. And yet it was that elemental girl who touched his senses, and that other who was so far away.

Then had come the scoffing of Deirdre at those things of the Beyond that were coming closer to him in the mists of Ireland—and with it their revealing by that other being of warm flesh and blood who yet seemed to live in other worlds. The breach that had first definitely shown itself that day of the Embankment when Deirdre had looked in cold contempt upon that mob of pinched grey faces—the look that had made him hate her—was now widening every day, although he had to confess that it was a breach which existed only in his imagination, for he had never been near Deirdre Asthar. But there would be moments when a glance from those starry eyes would set him aflame and make all else, including Stella, of no account.

For indeed, however ridiculous and helpless it seemed, he was deeply in love with Paris Asthar's sister, even though he sometimes hated her. And he was as deeply conscious of his inconstancy and shame.

It was here that little Paudeen had stepped in once more to resolve his doubts and to put the last touches to the destruction of the world he had begun to build about himself that day by the roadside.

He had been down at the curing sheds one day of December when the men and boats were all out at sea and the sun shone down on the icy waters of the bay. It had come to him as from a great distance—the voice from the sea. And so he had run to the end of the pier to find standing there Deirdre Asthar, a new Deirdre, her hands clasped in agony, looking down helpless and frightened into the water in which something struggled sluggishly. By her side the woman they had met that day by the roadside, motionless, stared into the waters.

Then he saw the little face turn upwards in the tides which

swirled furiously past the nose of the pier, bare even of a rope, sporting wanton with their prey before dragging it under.

The boy who, for all that splendid frame, could not swim, standing there angry, helpless, with the consciousness of futility, had called to the girl who, for all her dread of deep waters, could swim, to save him, and had heard the reply given with a new humility in the proud eyes. "I am afraid!"

In the cold sunlight something had run past them and plunged, a living stream of green, into the purple-grey of the waters. Through the swirl of the angry tides, she threaded her way with writhing double-handed stroke, the copper of her hair loosing out behind her under the pull of the currents, the emerald of her dress clinging to her limbs until she looked like some mermaid playing in the waters. But as Stella Fay reached the child, the undertow had dragged him down. For a moment, the girl had half risen in the waters, shaking the hair out of her eyes, and then had plunged under the surface.

For seconds they had stood there looking at the blank surface which showed no signs of life. Finn had hated the girl beside him. She who, although she could swim, had let the child drown—it was that other, who in the last minute had come so strangely close to him, that had ventured into the heart of the angry tides. And now she was gone.

But even as they looked, there was a flash of ruddy copper in the green waters as something beat itself towards the light with something clutched.

And it was then that Finn clambering down one of the stanchions that supported the pier, clinging, desperate, with leg and hand to the slippery surface, had reached down to take up the little broken child and hand him up into the arms of his mother. And so, finding foothold where the cement had fallen away, he had taken the girl up beside him, feeling the soft pressure of her foot upon his shoulder as she climbed lightly above him, and so she had reached down her hand to help him back into safety out of the whimper of the waters which lunged past.

But Deirdre Asthar had hurried away, the little proud head bowed, the slender shoulders moving convulsively.

"Thanks Finn," the girl had said as she stood there, her

garments clinging to her. She had reached out her hand to him, the other carelessly swinging her hair behind her head in one great dank horse-coil.

"Now you can kiss me."

She had pressed her body against him and held up the wet of her bright red lips to his.

He stooped and kissed her, once, twice, as a thirsty man drinks a glass of water that is lifted to his lips.

## XIX

### HYSSOP AND VINEGAR

WHEN Finn Fontaine's world fell to pieces on the impact of two kisses from a pair of red lips—when all that structure he had so laboriously evolved in the previous four years crashed about him, it left him dazed as though he had been physically hurt. And now, under the roar of the express which was bearing him to Euston, it seemed to him that he heard voices that whispered to him from under the tumult of the wheels.

These voices were many. Some urged him to lose himself in a coil of copper hair and a pair of red lips—others spoke to him of ambition and urged the slaying of self for the glorification of self, urged him to make his surrender to Thrum so that, becoming financially free, he might one day realise his art. And there was another, a strange little voice this, which seemed to him the voice of the island he was leaving and which told him as a mother might tell a child that neither desire nor ambition was the goal of life—but love.

Sometimes this last voice would come to him speaking through human lips, whilst, above, two eyes gazed steadfastly at him from under their serene assured brows. And then Deirdre Asthar would be speaking to him, not as in life, not as the frightened girl of that day by the sea, but as another Deirdre—a Deirdre that lay hidden beneath that other—the Deirdre that had revealed herself to him under her humiliation.

And her he called the spirit of Ireland, and it was of that spirit he had been trying to write in his first attempt at a book, and failing. Ireland, like Deirdre Asthar, refused analysis. One had feelings about her—one could not write about her.

So it was that Finn returned to London. His was no elation at the conquering of a beautiful woman—he felt himself rather the conquered. That day by the waters upon the moist compression of those lips he had felt strange exultation—

and afterwards that something "had touched the hem of his garment." Then the depression.

Now he understood why those monks up there in that monastery of Melleray on the side of the Knockmealdown mountains, many of them young men, strong men, gifted men, had walked out of life into the living death of the Trappist. He knew why some of them had taken the vows of perpetual silence and shut themselves into the tomb of their thoughts and the door upon dead memories. Now he knew why the Spirit's Elect had the comfort as well as the terrible courage of their convictions. Sorrow opened all doors, made plain the secret things of life. He had also his black draught—his also the hyssop and the vinegar.

He no more thought of marriage with Stella Fay than with the girl with whom he was finished for ever—Deirdre Asthar. Women like Stella Fay did not marry. They were the elemental things of life, going through the world to set the hearts of men afire and finally passing out themselves in strong blinding flame. To think of marriage with spirits like Deirdre Asthar was to think of the un-human and impossible. Love for such beings subsisted only upon the things of the spirit. It died upon fleshly approach. One did not love them as creatures of flesh and blood but loved rather something that stood behind them. And yet, though unapproachable, Deirdre Asthar was human—even adorable. Only now he had put the thought of her from him for ever—her coldness and contempt, as that physical cowardice which in man or woman seemed to him the unforgivable.

But why did he always see those starry eyes that veiled a secret from him?

Not that Stella Fay had taunted Deirdre with her cowardice. She had if anything been nicer to her—only the girl had drawn into herself, had avoided those others, except her half-brother and Mrs. O'Hara. And even in his most strenuous contempt, Finn remembered something that Father Lestrangle had once said about such things: "Cowardice, Finn, is a matter of temperament—the really brave man is the natural coward who masters his fear. And we must distinguish between cowardice and terror. I knew a general once, in the British army, who could not enter a house where there was a cat."



And Deirdre Asthar had always had that strange, unreasoning terror of deep waters, never, despite her being able to swim, venturing out of her depth. He had heard her say that, as a child, she would have this terror when entering her bath—a terror of something that lurked there to drag her down. And Mrs. O'Hara had told him the story of an English nurse who had frightened her by taking her into the deep waters under Carrickmore, and that since then she had feared. Yet Finn still thought she should have conquered herself. But, after all, what was it to him? She had never been anything to him nor ever could have been anything. To Deirdre Asthar he was nothing.

The atmosphere of Ash Villa was not however conducive to these thoughts. From the moment when the door was opened by a savage from Limehouse, whom Mrs. Fontaine had winkled out of a home for Protestant Foundlings, where she had been brought up on dogma and skilly, and who stood something over four feet in her heelless shoes, a wisp of cap set askew upon some aspid hair of a nondescript ginger and a corner of red flannel below the abbreviated skirts that was like a falling from grace—Finn was conscious of a new atmosphere in the home.

Ginger, as she had originally informed Mrs. Fontaine her name was, she not knowing any other, although her official name at the Protestant Foundlings was "G. Tinker," there always having been some doubt about her Christian name, met her new master with a friendly grin upon a generous mouth which displayed a vast sense of her importance in the scheme of things entire. She had never seen him before, but obviously wished him to feel at home from the start.

"Oh, sir—and we 'ave been a-hexpectin' of you for the larst parst two hours. We'd quite given you up for lorst. We 'ad indeed. Missus will be pleased—so will marster."

In the hall, a plate of blue china containing some carefully scattered visiting cards perched perilously upon the umbrella stand. The plate was chipped and had been substituted for its predecessor, which was whole, by Mrs. Fontaine, "because it might fall." On the stairs, some real carpet had replaced the imitation cork linoleum of some months before. In the little drawing-room, the blinds were carefully drawn to shut out any possible rays of the January sun from the new lace

curtains which Mr. Fontaine had purchased in one of his journeys from a nice young man with a broad nose a trifle hooky and a Lancashire accent who had told him "it being his birthday he was givin' 'em away." He had also confided to the believing Jemmy an aphorism which had caused him to ruminate over many days. He had said: "In this world, guv'nor, if ye've got nothing but your skin, the others will take away your skin too; but the more you have the more people want to give you."

In the little dark room, it was a case of high cockleorum and thank God from whom all blessings flow! His mother, arrayed more like a bride than a mother, in clothes of the lightest possible shade, with a cross of imitation diamonds pendant from her neck and a generally scintillating effect, received him with a new dignity; his father, not so shrunken, his hands in his pockets, viewing the effect from a remote corner. His aunt Bella who, as her sister became whiter and whiter, seemed to become blacker and blacker, looking indeed a perfect raven, appeared to be suffering from a certain access of acerbity and uric acid. She was sniffy—distinctly sniffy. And there was a smell of onions in the room. Upon the floor lay an ill-considered ornament in smithereens, Uncle Bobs, as he was informed, having just blown in and blown out again. Nobody troubled.

"I'll buy you a dozen of these," said Jemmy, touching one of the broken pieces with the toe of a contemptuous boot.

In the corner, reading happily a tract entitled "The Sinner in Hell," as he noticed when he threw his arms about her to kiss her, was his dear little grandmother.

On the wall hung an enlarged picture of the giver of all good things, Mr. Buldger Spellbind, whose beetling forehead and deep rather close-set eyes stared philanthropically at that other enlargement—the lady of Beauty Soap, now relegated finally to the position of a distant relation. For Mr. Fontaine had, in his new found prosperity, given up selling "Beauty" and had, metaphorically, told the terrible MacGlusky to go to the devil with his coals. That is to say, in point of actual fact, he had gone more or less hat in hand and with a certain proud humility asked permission to resign in view of "having come into some money." For "The Happy Homes of England, Limited" were rushing upwards and James Fontaine

and his wife had sold out at hundreds per cent. and were thinking of retiring.

The only blot upon all this was Aunt Bella, who, it appeared, had had a slight "seizure." (Mrs. Fontaine said it with a certain distant dignity that conjured visions of creditable apoplectic seizures of the rich with side-whiskered medical practitioners.) When she got up to walk to the door, Finn noticed that she tottered a little, whilst the scar on her face, which had taken a whiter hue, twitched. But what she lost in physical power she made up in a religious venom that would have done credit to a converted Russell's viper. She at least had no doubts that the present affluence was a trick of Satan to seduce the souls of her sister and brother-in-law, and she said so, what time the eye of Aunt Maria, who was trying to hide herself behind the door, rolled itself piously around.

"Of course you could not expect us to take in lodgers," said Mrs. Fontaine distantly and apropos of nothing in particular. "Not even paying guests. It is so demeaning. We are about to give that person Ström upstairs notice—he and his vibrations indeed and his sculpture. His ridiculous statues! Not a bit like life." Mrs. Fontaine sniffed a trifle.

It looked doubtful for the Swedish lodger, who, in order, as he said, "to refine his vibrations," had recently developed excessive tendencies to purification of the body, internal and external, which, taking the form of purges and sunbaths, had caused further complications in the road.

"Genevieve," said Mrs. Fontaine to Ginger, "serve the tea."

"They called her 'Ginger'," she explained loftily as the little servant with a "Yes 'm" went out of the room. "We could not have that, of course, so we have baptised" (she said the word again, thought she really meant "christened") "her Genevieve. Really, when she first came she was quite a savage. Quite. Had the most heretical notions about Christianity and used the oddest expressions—the oddest. . . ." Mrs. Fontaine opened her eyes slightly at Finn, who was sitting with one long arm about his little grandmother who was patting the bony hand as she used to do when Finn was a tiny baby.

"Of course you know we Cutheys have a crest," said Mrs.

Fontaine largely and assuredly. "Perhaps you would like to see it." She went over to what she called her "escritoire," and, taking out a sheet of greyey-blue paper, pushed it over to Finn, who saw upon the top an apoplectic black goose with a silver spoon in its beak. "A *silver* spoon," said Mr. Fontaine making one of his rare jokes.

But Mrs. Fontaine said it was a swan and appeared much disgusted at what she called Finn's plebeian imagination, for Finn in his innocence had referred to it as the inferior bird. Aunt Judy, with her capacity for putting her foot in it, had also mistaken the bird for a goose, and Aunt Bella had turned the iron in the wound by remarking in airy malignancy: ". . . but all Fanny's geese are swans."

His father, in his corner, seemed to have something on his mind. He made several what his grandmother called "offers" to speak, coming half way out of his corner to do so, but was prevented by the majestic attitude of his wife, who obviously was determined to steer the ship of prosperous state. At last it came out.

He had had a personal interview with Mr. Spellbind, who had advised him to "double his capital and go the whole hog" (Mr. Spellbind for so serious a pillar of the church had curious lapses at times) by buying back some of the shares he had sold in The Happy Homes of England, which he said were worth double their present market price. "For his part, he did not mind doing a fellow-Christian a good turn and in regard to getting the shares cheap he knew a man. . . ." He had even given Mr. Fontaine his signed photo which now hung over the mantelpiece.

"A sweet man," said Jemmy.

"A noble soul," responded his wife.

"Cent. per cent.," said Mr. Fontaine with a business acerbity unusual.

Finn felt strangely uneasy in all this affluence. Through his association with Crux, he knew a little of Buldger Spellbind and his "reconstructions," in which he specialised. Outside the "the city" he was regarded as a public benefactor and philanthropist—inside, in admiring praise, as "that downy bird—Spellbind." In fact, it had lately become quite the fashion for religion and finance to get mixed together, just as the church and stage had been mixing in the previous decade,

with a fine tolerance on the part of the former and as fine and good-humoured a contempt on the part of the latter. At the last masked ball held at the Conventual Garden, the first and second prizes had been won by two men got up respectively as "Church and Stage" and "Religion and Finance." The first had made up half of his face and body as a clergyman with shovel hat, choker and black coat, and the other half as a rouged and painted lady of the ballet from her coiffure to her abbreviated frills and well-proportioned silk-tighted calf. The other had made up one half of his body as a Jew money lender, holding in his hand the sign of the three golden balls, his nose was pendulous, his eye cupreous, and the other half as a sort of Reverend Stiggins, with broken black cotton gloves, gamp and dirty white socks.

When he looked at the shrunken respectability of his progenitor, the moist, grey, believing eye and the last pair of bulbous boots and then up at the little close-eyed man with the bulging forehead which he had always associated with poisoners, his heart misgave him. He felt, as he always felt in that atmosphere, a sense of overwhelming depression and, as always, finding it unbearable, he went out into the hall, took up his hat and made his way over to the Titterlings. Mrs. Titterling and Mary were the only two beings he could find tolerable after Ireland.

Mrs. Titterling, as ever, greeted him serenely, with a quiet welcome that seemed to be always expectant. But there came to him as he looked at her a feeling of something changed. The apparent calmness of gaze had something deep, eroding, in the heart of it as one sees red suns in the blackness of mountain lakes. There was a wildness, for all its outward calm, in the grey eye, and it seemed to him that something was tearing at the heart of this woman.

Mr. Titterling he found luxuriating in the little back drawing room, no longer scrabbling for cigarette ends under the fireplace, but smoking from a case of green crocodile, with an excessive gold "T. T." on the outside, long gold-tipped fellows which he drew down into his lungs one after the other to his exceeding satisfaction. (It was the first time Finn had ever seen him with a whole cigarette.) The monocle glittered at an aggressive angle. In the tie a horseshoe diamond pin made play with the flames of the fire, and, in fact, as Mr.



Titterling made himself announced between two spasms of Master Seymour who, being at the moment a Bedouin chief, kept plunging in and out of the room at intervals, mostly unexpected, from the desert of the passage followed by Larkin and Plantagenet, he was "flush." Little Elizabeth, showing rather more red drawer than usual, pillowed her tossed head on Bluggins the bulldog, who licked his chops in friendly but inconsequent greeting to Finn.

Yet to Finn there came something of that same uneasiness which he had felt when he had looked at Mrs. Titterling. The two horns of hair curled with their unsure parting over the high nose and humorous eyes and mouth of Mr. Titterling, who to Finn looked like a gay dog but a sad dog after a night of it.

"Listen to 'em," he said, as he motioned with his head through the wall from which came the sound of one of those bitter-sweet hymns chaunted by Elder Parkinson and Mrs. Titterling. "They give me the creeps."

"Finn," he said all at once. "Do you believe in hell?" The monocle had dropped to reveal an anxious eye. "Damned if I don't," he added enigmatically without waiting for an answer.

Finn, without knowing exactly why, liked this sad bad dog of a Titterling. There was something so genuine and so friendly about him that he always liked to speak with him. There was something so understanding and tolerant—that was it—tolerant, something so nearly loveable, that he always felt at home and unstrained with this man.

"You know, Finn, when I was a little chap going to the Baptist chapel, I thought hell was all my eye. Now I'm not so sure. I never believed in it until I kicked over the traces. You know what it was with me—well, I'll tell you, though you're young for that sort of thing—it was the women. Gawd's truth, but I never knew whether they were angels or devils. The worst of them could have made me a saint and the best of them a sinner. Jiggered if I know the difference. The sinner makes the best saint. Tell you the honest to God, some of the Piccadilly ladies have filled me as a boy with more fine thoughts and yearnings for the unattainable than my own wife, whom I worship as I have never worshipped my God. Why is it, Finn, that the good woman never fills one with beautiful fancies? Why is it always the Strange Woman?"

He looked at the boy in humorous bewilderment and hit a



lump of coal on the head with the poker as though he would see what was inside.

"Finn," he said, breaking off suddenly as though it had just occurred to him: "What is love?"

Finn blushed hotly. Some of these things he had been hearing were the things he himself had been feeling.

"Needn't flush, old man," said Mr. Titterling in his friendly fashion. "We've all been through it." He drew a deep breath of cigarette smoke and expelled it thinly through a corner of his mouth looking at it like a connoisseur through the monocled eye. He had become serious.

"Tell you what. The old girl guesses something. She's tumbled to something. You thought I didn't see you that day at Liverpool Street Station when that girl was saying good-bye to me. Ah, but I did." He looked knowingly at the boy.

"It's all about her. Left one of her letters about—damned awkward and damned careless—and I believe the missus found it. P'rhaps not. But she has a funny look in her eye the last few days and she has been praying at me through that wall." He gestured through the wall with a cigarette held like a pencil between finger and thumb.

"Ever been prayed at? It's awful, Finn, awful . . ."

"Push off, you young devil," he broke off to adjure young Seymour who had just made another raid, looking more than ever like locusts and wild honey.

"She's been praying at me now for four days and nights. She threatens me with hell and I'm afraid. That's Gawd's truth, I'm afraid. Not only afraid of her hell, but of something else. There's something calculating and suppressed in her that frightens me. I know Popples" (it was his pet name for his wife), "and she'd stick at nothing. I know her. She'd damn you to save your soul—that's the only way I can put it—like Torquemada and that little lot.

"Well, so long. I'm going to hoof it. Can't stand that thing there. Not a word to the wife . . ." He had slipped out.

Finn sat there wondering at the complexity and yet similarity of life. Much that Titterling had said to him was his own story with Deirdre Asthar and Stella, the battle between body and spirit. He put his head down between his long legs and bony knees. The world was too much for him.

He was awakened by a gentle pressure on his shoulder, and

looked up to find little Mary Titterling, strangely bigger and older, looking at him with her serious eyes, her black hair falling about her. And then she had thrown herself into his arms and her own long slender arms about his neck and had pressed her face to his.

"Oh, Finn, Finn," was all she could say. And then . . .  
 "Oh, I'm so glad you're back—I'm in such trouble."

She had taken herself away with a little gesture of grave dignity and stood looking at him, her hands clasped behind her back. "It's mother and father . . . and . . . everything." And then she had broken into a torrent of weeping as though her world also were too much for her, whilst Bluggins and little Elizabeth looked on astonished.

"I can't believe, Finn. I can't believe. I don't believe in mother's hell and in the Spirit's Elect. I can't . . ." She said it piteously. "I believe God is love. I believe love can do all things—can save father and all of us. I want love—to be loved. I want to love the whole world."

She stood there. "I cannot bear to live without love," she said. "They don't love. They hate." She nodded through the wall as her father had done.

And then, impetuous, she had thrown herself into his arms once more and had placed her arms about his neck and had told him shyly: "I love you, Finn, I love you."

And he had kissed her and comforted her and so it was that, coming in from the prayer-meeting on the other side of the wall, her nose very much on one side from her naturally good heart trying to encompass the terrifying belief in the damnation of the whole race outside the Elect, a trifle heartbroken, and now in the sceptical sneery stage through which she always passed in her religious experiments, Aunt Judy had found them.

Finn returned to Ash Villa to find a big square rough-papered envelope, faintly scented, awaiting him from Stella Fay, with a letter asking him to go to the reception by the London Universalists to Ellen Masters at Charing Cross, who now was on her way from India. "It is a new revelation," she had written in her strong upright hand with the printed capitals. "And she is bringing Chandra Pal, 'the Light from the East.' It is his thirty-sixth reincarnation. Won't you come . . ." and then she had written after a little space, in inverted commas: "Finn, dear?"

## XX

ELLEN MASTERS

One at least had marked Finn's new hesitancy. The Jesuit, with that instinct of his order which has trained reason into intuition, saw that his time had come, and made a great effort to do what he had all along had in mind—to win the boy for the church, for one of those active orders where those gifts of speech and energy which Finn was now revealing to the interested eye of the priest could be used to the best advantage.

This tall man, with the dark rolling eye, had guessed more than Finn ever could have thought possible. Paris Asthar and his half sister he knew, as Finn had discovered, and then there was Father Con in Dunhallow, so that it did not need extraordinary exercise of the imagination for Father Lestrangle to piece together that disordered mosaic of Finn Fontaine's later years.

He had invited him to the Catholic Cathedral at Westminster, where the sermon had been preached by a prince of the Church, a famous cardinal, an Irishman, whose tall ascetic figure and boyish face with its close-cut white hair standing out from under the scarlet biretta, which he had removed in the pulpit, and scarlet robe peeping from under his surplice, had deeply impressed the boy. He had preached upon "False Gods," choosing for his text: "Thou shalt have none other gods but Me."

This scarlet-frocked priest had spoken of the false gods now being "created" (a curious word), throughout the world, and their symbols. The false gods of Democracy with their symbol of blood, the Red Flag, reared in defiance of the symbol of Religion, the Cross, and, as he spoke, Finn had thought of how General Bliss and Paris Asthar had once said much the same thing about symbols but in other words, although the latter had said that the symbols of Christianity and Democracy

were both symbols of blood—the Crucifixion and the Red Flag.

Of Ireland—and the voice, until then harsh, dominating, softened strangely as he said it—he spoke with a rare affection, saying that in the years to come the Island of the Faith would once more become to Europe and the world “the Isle of Saints” as it had in the centuries that were gone. It also had its symbol—the Green Flag—and for a moment the Churchman had become the politician, for the eyes had flashed under their dark curving brows. But through it all, the Church of Rome moved assured, triumphant, up to that last day when, as the speaker said, “the final battle, the battle between the dogmas of this world and of the world to come—the dogmas of Socialism and Catholicism—would usher in the Armageddon from which the Church of Christ would emerge triumphant for all time.”

But before then, he said, the world was to have another Armageddon—a great war which should have only one object, whatever the apparent reason might be: “the tearing down of the veils between this world and the next and with it the destruction of that materialism which had gradually during the preceding half century been covering the spirit of Europe like a poisonous accretion.”

It was on this note the sermon had finished—a note of omnipotent faith. It was what Finn had once heard Paris Asthar say that evening at “The Cloisters” to the professors, and he had seen Paris Asthar himself standing in one of the side aisles watching the Mass as though it had been a show and smiling secretly to himself. The face seemed to have sunk still more into its folds, crumbling away behind them, as he had first noticed it that night of Asthar’s struggle with Patsey in the House of Dreams.

There ran to his mind, irrelevant, a favourite gibe of Asthar’s: “To every bishop his crook.” He was always gibing at Christianity and calling himself “a Pagan.”

The Jesuit had taken him after the gorgeous paganism of the Byzantine mass to the high tower from where London stretched itself out into a grey infinity around them, and from there he had shown him, if not all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, other kingdoms. Finn had been deeply moved by the Mass and had felt that same almost painful desire which he had felt that day in the Strand Tabernacle,

to throw himself upon the bosom of infinity and let himself be carried out on the wings of the spirit. The tinkle of tambourine, the bray of trumpet, and the smash of drum—the shouts of the faithful as the exhortation of the speaker—had been replaced by the deep sourdine of the invisible organ, the voices of men and boys chanting and the grandeur of the mass with its embroidered traditions of the centuries . . . but the feeling was the same. Finn knew that both were the same thing.

And, not knowing that, the Jesuit knew nothing. He had marked Finn's emotion and he believed as such clever spirits believe that his time had come—whereas it had passed.

He found the boy strangely unresponsive to the story in which he contrasted the evanescence of the present with the eternal permanence of the future. And then he had been silent, to say after a moment:

"I think there is something else at the bottom of this, Finn, my boy." He had placed a lean white hand upon the boy's shoulder as they looked at the sun sinking dully down through the frosty mists of a February day. He broke off . . . "I knew a man, once, Finn . . . He was, I think, a strong man, and he meant to be a good one . . . he was a man much as you will one day be. He had more than his share of good looks—don't blush, Finn, for you are becoming rather a splendid-looking fellow, you know," he said smilingly, "and he had a good deal more than his fair share of brains—at least, so his teachers said, and it seemed to him on the threshold of life that only one thing existed there—a pair of woman's eyes . . ." He was again silent for a moment, the ball of red flame as it sunk showing itself in smouldering fires in the depths of the eyes, the face illumined as it looked through the haze of blue silver. "And in those eyes he lost himself—soul and body.

"I knew the man, I say—that is why I speak so surely of him . . . he told me his story. He was a Catholic and she a Protestant. But it was not that. He had pledged himself when quite a child to other eyes, to those of Mary the Mother of God. But once I . . ." he corrected himself quickly, "he thought the sun, moon and stars turned round his divinity, but there came the moment when he had to decide between his love and the Church, his love for God or for the



world. He chose God, and he has never regretted it . . . .”

He said it strongly enough, but his voice faltered a little as he said it. Finn, looking at the tall figure where it stood near the lofty coping, seemed to see a light of neither earth nor heaven shining upon the dark face as he had seen it stand in that dream of long ago before the flickering fires of the open pit.

From the high tower where he had seen the sun sink in blue fire behind the bricks and mortar, Finn went to his afternoon engagement with Stella Fay, whom he was to meet at the Universalist headquarters in Piccadilly. The Jesuit might have shaken him, had it not been that the desire to love which filled him was not founded upon any particular faith, but upon Faith. This desire was to him the same thing as that exaltation which came to him sometimes out of nothing—it was the thing of which he got the reflection as faces that men see in dark wells or the thing caught in the web of memories from the days of the twilight when men and spirits had loved and played together, something conjured by Patsey’s fairies or by a fang of grey ruin sentinelling lonely seas—or the thing that seemed to lie behind all work and play and prayer as it lay behind the face of a young girl or the voice of a boy. The wish to love.

Sometimes the passion of this thing seemed to lie in the touch of Stella Fay, who, in a carnate way, made flesh and spirit one and invisible.

And again, sometimes, it seemed to him that this same thing, this desire, this driving force, lay in ambition. He longed for power, for recognition, but this faith of his was also part of that longing. He wished to have power over the souls of men and then it would come to him that it was not domination he wanted but love—that his wish for power was but a sort of hunger for souls. He wished to love and to be loved.

Mary Titterling was right. Patsey was right. Love was the heart of all things. Love could not be placed behind the bars of any tabernacle or any church. Love and faith were one thing. It was the thing that was the universal solvent, not only of the barriers between men, but of those between the worlds of matter and spirit. And sometimes the grey hunger-line of the Embankment would drift across his consciousness like a wreath of smoke.



But these thoughts quickly passed as he came to the Universalist headquarters with the mystic snake, its tail in its mouth, symbol of eternity, over the door of the bookshop which formed the ground floor of the place. The shop was closed, it being a Sunday, but he ran his eye over the books in the window.

Here also that synthesis of love and faith seemed to be at work. A book upon modern ghost stories lay side by side with a book upon Indian Yoga, and another upon "Fluidic Vitalism," whatever that might mean. The Bhagavad Gita nestled close to a morocco bound copy of the New Testament, whilst a gilt statue of the Buddha smiled sleepily across the expanse of shelf at a plaster figure of the Christ. Here, a book on "Love and Death," a book of beauty as Finn knew, lay side by side with a little pretentious pamphlet called "On the Threshold," with the superscription by "An Indweller" in a sort of arrogant humility. That queer book of Paris Asthar upon "How the Gods Are Born," which had been banned as blasphemous from the public libraries, stared insolent from its yellow binding at a treatise upon the Persian religions, whilst Thomas à Kempis's "Imitation of Christ" lay by the side of "The Delphic Oracle," and a book upon "The Secret of the Pyramids" opened at a passage which said that they had never been used for tombs, but only as chambers for the preparation of the neophyte for the secrets of the priesthood and urging that they should be restored to their former use.

With all this he had a sort of cuneiform vision of books covered with the hieroglyphics of Babylon and Egypt and others with the lettering of Sanscrit, whilst modern faiths were represented by a treatise upon the newly introduced to Europe universal religion of Bahaism.

Of course Universalism itself, which professed to be the synthesis of all religions, ancient and modern, lay inextricably around and through all this as a sort of matrix.

Surely here was that synthesis of life which Finn had seemed to be realising, but, instead, it left him bewildered, impressed and doubtful. This was rather patchwork than synthesis. Yet the book on Universalism which Stella had lent him had, with its recognition of one central point common to all religions, struck fire from his imagination.

In the passage at the side of the shop, where a riot of per-

fumes struggled together, he found a gilded cage aflutter with strange birds—he could even see some feathers waving in the half light—one of the birds, which finally showed itself as a small brass-bound boy, struggling to open the highly gilded gate of the lift, which he had just shut on the others.

In one corner, after he had entered, Finn found a sort of bull-man, whose frock coat clothed him sleekly, his absurdly diminutive hand holding a big curly-brimmed silk hat. From above the high and glossy collar he beamed ecstatically upon Finn to his extreme confusion, which was deepened by finding close to him a sort of ancient Babylonian dancing girl, her withered chins enlaced by strings of Persian turquoises, like the crop of some old fowl, who looked at him in quick bird-like fashion from under the nodding cock plumes which crested forward from her high round hat. She was so *décollété* that she made him ashamed, and her perilous skirts rustled as she moved. It was the rustle of riches as Finn had come to know it and it made him angry in a resentful way.

On the other side of him in the lift was an old lady with a heavily furrowed face of strong intelligence that he found beautiful in its ugliness. Her eyes reminded him of Mrs. O'Hara's. In another corner, a young white-haired man on crutches rested himself against the side and surveyed the whole with a sort of humourous indulgence.

The contents of the cage were as mixed as the books in the shop below.

And so they were shot out upon a sort of platform before a draped door, inside which he was received by Stella Fay, who introduced him in a whisper (everybody spoke in whispers), to the secretary, a tall, languid-looking young woman, with tired, sceptical eyes. Scattered about the floor, distinctly superior people stood in graceful attitudes with a tendency to a sidelong projection of hip and an undefined trend to the ecstatic.

He glanced curiously around the spacious room, which smelt like a Catholic church. There was a semi-Orientalism about the place which brought to the mind the inner chamber of a palmist or certain sides of the Earl's Court Exhibition. The room, like the people who filled it, seemed to have attempted something and failed. It was as though a ballet girl had tried to become a nun.

Stella, her hand guiding his elbow, was watching him closely. It seemed to him there was something mocking in her look. As so often, she seemed to be laughing at herself as well as at everything.

He looked up, troubled from her glance, to find a face staring at him out of a picture that hung above a draped portal, over the heavy velvet curtains of which "The Temple" was written in gold lettering. The pin-point irises fixed him with an expression of concentrated power that was nearly terrifying. It was the face of one who had pierced matter to reach the thing that lay behind it, had pierced into mind, if not spirit, and had sacrificed everything to knowledge and to the power that was knowledge. Stella Fay told him that it was Madame Spiridanovitch, the founder of Universalism, usually known as "the Spiridanovitch."

There was no question about the quality of that painting, but it faced a banal sugary figure of Christ, whilst towering behind him he found the glassy eyes of a plaster figure of a woman of an excessive maternity suckling a lumpy baby, and called "The Mother." On another wall, the painting of a young woman staring into nothingness with an expression meant to be soulful hung side by side with a faceless figure with a lamp, standing outside a low wicket set in an old wall and very beautiful. It was all part of the confusion of the place and of the people in it.

Stella, who seemed to take a perverse delight in introducing him to different people and watching the effect, brought him over to the *décollété* lady of the lift, who was holding forth to a little circle near by.

He was surprised at the variety of type.

About him raged a sort of allegorical conversation out of which he caught strange words. Mahatmas, Gurus, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gitas, Gñuanis, threaded one another, whilst the lady towards whom he had been led was fast becoming fourth-dimensional, using a word that sounded like "Guhurt-namatana" with frequency. Two other words—"Maya" and "Karma" would every now and then pop up and duck down again.

Stella Fay told him the story of this lady, who was, or had been, for he gathered in some cloudy way that she had divorced several husbands, a Mrs. Leghorn. She it was who had led

the secession from the ranks of the Dawn Thinkers, at that time headed by a Mrs. Kronkhorse, a lady with a cosmic dash in her like an inherited taint, who had hailed from the U. S. A. Mrs. Kronkhorse, it seemed, had been a little corpulent bulging-eyed woman, possessed of considerable gifts of oratory and organisation, but Mrs. Leghorn had been too much for her.

Mrs. Leghorn had been in many similar sects which, with a positive genius for splitting, seemed always to be in a state of disintegration, much to the advantage of the Universalists, who thrived accordingly. She was now trying to form a sort of inner circle in the Universalists to be called "The Sons and Daughters of the Morning Star," but, as Stella Fay said, "in spite of all her spiritual hindleggedness, she was going to have a pretty bad time when Ellen Masters came back." Ellen Masters, like her predecessor, "the Spiridanovitch," stood no nonsense. She ruled by a sort of divine right, but even Stella Fay had to admit that she was a most beloved woman of singular power and sweetness, who never abused her authority.

The only spot on Mrs. Leghorn's sun was the wife of an African bishop, a Mrs. Largo, who despised her husband's religion as only the wife of an African bishop could, and who was now challenging Mrs. Leghorn's supremacy in the new circle. She was a large woman with a commanding air, who now stood a little outside the group, regarding her rival with a certain voluminous contempt.

All this time, the big bullish man who had been in the lift, standing head and shoulders above that crowd, and looking like a man who had rushed at the cosmos head down, was declaiming to all that cared to listen that he had given up smoking and drinking and meat and that he was "Cured!" this last in a stentorian bellow. His arms waved. His voice boomed. Finn recognised the Penitent Form, but of a superior kind.

Speaking afterward to an elder Daughter of the Morning in Paradise silk and to her daughter, "a neophyte," as she told Finn, who was attired in a slender robe of some white woollen stuff with a rope around the waist, he learned that the gentlemanly bull, who now looked pale and interesting from his last fall from grace, was apt to have what his informants called "lapses." It was this gentleman who, running upon him after an introduction by Stella Fay, informed him: "We have been

together, my dear boy, in the court of Rameses in Lower Egypt . . . and don't you remember me, my dear old chap? Knew you the moment I looked at you." Mr. Buck Cronstairs, the well-known "blood" and man-about-town, reminded him more than once of Uncle Bobs.

It was a most astonishing place. The lady in the Paradise silk discovered to him that he had been a priest in the time of Ra-Ra some four thousand years before, putting it to him as a business proposition and in a commonsense way as to whether he did not remember dancing the Sacred Dance with her before the Quenchless Fire, which so staggered him that he did gurgle something in his throat which might be taken as acquiescence or denial.

There was a real discoloured Indian there, who was suspected of being a sacred prince and who had a habit of seeing things. He, Finn, was informed, was the two hundred and thirty-third reincarnation of one of the Gurus of Hindustan, but ancient though he was, he was but a mere youth by the side of an old gentleman who assured Finn quite coolly that he had lived in Atlanta.

Through all this, Stella Fay moved with that queer mocking smile, watching Finn.

It was the same chaos that was over the bookshop below—a newer Twentieth Century Tower of Babel. Everything was labelled and put away in a nicely docketted bottle. They even labelled and bottled the Godhead. They were very like some of the scientists, he thought. What they did not understand, they simply labelled and left it.

And yet Finn could not fail to see many earnest faces amongst those about him. There was a white-haired young woman, with startlingly black brows and eyes, who confided to him that between Universalism and Universalists there was a great gulf fixed. "We started with a fervent desire to abolish all dogma and now have made that a dogma. It is mankind's tendency to crystallisation."

Whilst he was speaking to this young woman he was astonished to find standing inside the door as though he had been blown in by the wind, Ström, his mother's lodger. He stood there, a queer figure of a man, with black curling hair that sprouted from crown and nostril and face, falling over a pair of goat-like faithful eyes which brought back Aunt Judy. He



was dressed in a frock with certain strange braidings upon the sleeves and a pair of boots that looked like sandals.

Under his arms he carried a pair of hooded statues, "those ridiculous statues" of Mrs. Fontaine, holding them as though they had been a pair of babies.

The languid secretary approached him, Finn hearing him say that he had brought two of his statues for Ellen Masters as a present, he being obviously nonplussed when that young woman held out her hands for them as though they had been a bunch of flowers. But Ström would not. He had come to place them within the Temple itself—within that Holy of Holies of Universalism.

There was something devoted in the face of the Swede, who he knew had been working upon a series of symbolic caryatic figures, for a temple upon an island set in the sapphire seas of Sweden which he wanted Ellen Masters to build. He had lived meanly, poorly, for the sake of his life-dream, as Finn also knew, for his mother had sometimes had to complain about the rent, and here was this languid girl taking his gold and frankincense and myrrh as though it were of no account.

"But—but," he heard him say with a sort of puzzled reverence, "I cannot allow another to place my statues. That is for the artist. There is a . . . an art in placing." He said it with a proud humility, but the young woman was tired and yawned behind a manicured hand.

"You see to him," she said to Mrs. Leghorn as she hurried away. "I've got to get ready for the chief."

"If you want to enter the Temple you must take off your boots and put on those," said the lady of the turquoises pointing to a pair of oriental slippers. "No profane feet must enter the temple. It is the Holy of Holies. Go on. You've got to do it," she said, becoming religiously skittish.

The sculptor looked at her reproachfully with wide-open child-like eyes, and gathering his statues still closer to him he went away in silent dignity. The dust seemed to be shaken from the broad soles of the sandalled feet and the frock coat had become a gabardine.

There was a rush towards the doors as a high voice said: "The Master comes in half an hour." Stella Fay, who throughout had been holding herself remarkably well in hand, pressed Finn in that close proprietorial way which had now become so



common with her, laying her silken sleeve upon his arm and moving with him towards the door.

When they entered the station they found most of the people they had left drawn up in ranks of reception, forming with others who had joined them a gathering of both sexes and all ages, on the outskirts of which, in dishevelled curiosity, hung a human derelict who had drifted into the station. Here was every type. Earnest young faces. Old haggard women, still striving after the elixir of youth, who had passed from congregation to congregation and from cult to cult. One or two fine-looking old women of the type of the woman Finn had seen in the lift—the woman with the wrinkled face. But few old men. And the young bull-man dancing from one foot to the other, alternately lunging back and forward. Later Finn learned to know it as the reception atmosphere.

There was a rumbling, a whistle, a turning of heads and eyes, and then a saloon coach had run up opposite the chalked inclosure in which stood the sheep of the elect. Looking through the windows of the private carriage Finn saw an old silvery haired lady with something leonine in eye and mouth, the symbol of the serpent upon her breast, seated opposite a young and very dark Indian boy, dressed with a painful correctness in European dress, over whose Eton collar the long lank hair fell to the shoulders. There was a reverential straining of eyeball as a low murmur went up from those assembled.

Finn noticed in particular a weak-looking monastic young man of abnormal stature whose small burning eyes and hooked nose might have stepped out of a mediaeval cell, who, with Mr. Buck Cronstairs had stationed himself opposite the door, and as the old lady, clad in some white hooded woollen stuff that gave to her something of the priestess, came to descend, he was amazed to see the two men each take a corner of her white full skirts and lift them a few inches from the ground, so that holiness might not be stained by the mud of London, displaying as they did so a pair of elastic side boots and white cotton stockings that made Finn love her. Ellen Masters passed with a series of dignified bows to the victoria upon the box of which sat the bareheaded coachman, waiting.

As he looked, the wretch he had seen hanging on the edges of the crowd, lousy, brutalised, his hair hanging over the collar of his greasy coat, pushed his way through some of the

swarming acolytes, who repulsed him with horrified gestures as he tried to beg. With a motion of the grey-veined hand, unadorned save for a great sapphire upon the forefinger, the woman had made room for him to come to her. She had taken his filthy hand in hers, had looked with that look that might have come from a Christ into the sodden eyes of the astonished man, and had placed her purse in his hand, the heavy leonine eyes bent upon him in loving friendliness. To the admiring murmurs of her devotees she turned a cold indifferent eye, looking upon them sadly and heavily. And then she had swept to her carriage and had driven away like a Queen of Heaven, the gold of the serpent upon her breast glittering under a last ray of light which had found its way under the arch of the station.

Here was another symbol, the serpent-symbol of Universalism, as the Cross was that of the Jesuit, the Red Flag of Democracy and the Green Flag of Ireland. All these things touched Finn. Was it that they stood for one thing—the thing behind existence?

## XXI

### FAITH AND FINANCE

Jemmy Fontaine was in the middle of an elaborate toilet, assisted by his wife and a skirmishing and ecstatic Ginger. Mrs. Fontaine had taken from the olive oil flask in the wicker-work cover the anointing reserved for the more sacred occasions of life and had liberally doused Jemmy's disappearing hair until the scalp beneath shone again.

There had been rather a pointed argument about the third-best tie, which Jemmy said didn't matter as he wore a beard and nobody ever saw it, but Ginger had diplomatically inserted the second-best and as Mrs. Fontaine, sententious, said: "*That was that.*" The white socks had also been a source of trouble, falling shamelessly over the tops of Jemmy's high uppers, with the two top holes unlaced, and revealing some inches of hairy calf when he sat down. For Jemmy never wore drawers which, following his mother, he regarded as unhealthy, and neither threat nor persuasion on the part of his wife had been able to move this article of belief.

At last he was made ready this December morning ten months after that reception to Ellen Masters. The top hat of his prosperity still shone, though wanly. Under his arm he carried a formidable umbrella, without ferrule, as Jemmy wore them down and never renewed them. A pair of new white wool gloves were on his hands with the right ready to draw off at a moment's notice in the event of Mr. Buldger Spellbind being seized with an overwhelming desire to take him by the hand—something from which he frequently suffered where the shareholders in the Happy Homes of England, Limited, were concerned.

For the Happy Homes were the occasion of these solemn preparations. The meeting ("special general" was the technical and impressive description) had been advertised with

broad tolerance not only in the hectic press, but in "The Low Churchman," as in the newspapers of the Nonconformist Conscience, and was to be held in the large hall of the Metropolitan Mission Centre at the other end of the Tottenham Court Road, which was indifferently given over to faith and finance, where Mr. Spellbind usually held his meetings.

There had been a second reconstruction of the Homes and, if Mr. Spellbind had his way, there was going to be a third. "Doing it on them" was the comment of the vulgar and irresponsible Plugg, who owned and edited that organ of public opinion with the million circulation—"The Plain Englishman." But Plugg was irreligious and kept racehorses. So it didn't matter about Plugg.

Within the previous months, Mr. and Mrs. Fontaine had been cast from the heights of affluence into a condition that can best be described as mercurial. Jemmy, under the advice of Spellbind, had been buying back large quantities of the Happy Homes shares which he had sold at such a big profit, and these shares were now, in the words of a reverend shareholder who had written to "The Earth" about it, "in a parlous condition." The shares, which were not quoted in the Stock Exchange list, had been transferred to Jemmy upon various and several occasions by gentlemen of the names of Wigginbottom, Buckle and an obviously honest man of the name of Smith. But Plugg, in that alliterative way of "The Plain Englishman," had said in his columns under the title: "Faith or Fake?" that Wigginbottom was Spellbind, and Spellbind, instead of taking a libel action and recovering thousands as he said he might easily have done, had, instead, prayed for his enemy, and that publicly. This had impressed even nasty shareholders, who had been wavering.

And here was Jemmy wedged in the midst of a couple of thousand other Jemmies before the platform of the Metropolitan Mission, hypnotised by the close-set eyes and philanthropic forehead of Mr. Spellbind, who had opened the meeting with a hymn, which had taken the starch out of a score of bloodthirsty clergymen who, in the words of "The Plain Englishman," were "out for blood." (Buldger Spellbind was well aware of the ferociousness of the lamb of Christ when deprived of dividends and took his precautions accordingly.) One of these bloodthirsty shareholders, an old dog at the game, upon

the giving out of the hymn, had raised a weak and unchristian protest against mixing the sacred with the profane, but had been quickly blanketed into silence by a shocked "Hush!" largely led by Jemmy, who, with some hundreds of others, looked upon Mr. Spellbind as not a little lower than the angels.

As for Mr. Spellbind, he was careful to confine himself to generalities, speaking vaguely but soothingly about the Christlessness and the Socialism of the age, as evidenced by the marchings to and fro of the unemployed, as he said, poetically, "seeking whom they might devour." It seemed that the costs of administration of the Homes had been very high owing to the rabid demands of irreligious workmen, largely incited thereto by haters of religion like MacAdam and Red Borb, and they had also been subjected to a most un-Christian strike against rent by "wretches who didn't know a good house when they saw one."

Also, and here the chairman fixed his audience effectively, the shares had been the subject of gambling. That was a hit. The little shrunken middle-class investors, convicted of sin, crept closer together. "Buldger," as Jemmy's neighbour, a little oilman from the borough, said, "was indeed in his best form. Most impressive."

He was consideration itself. From under this mildly reproachful accusation of the little man with the small overhung eyes, there gradually emerged the unpleasant fact that the Happy Homes were under the necessity of finding fresh capital or going "Phut!" This last sound Mr. Spellbind realistically produced by exploding his cheeks. He paused a moment, looking over the rows of faces before him, and, apparently, reassured, gradually revealed the golden reward which would come to those who had the money and the faith to find the fresh capital, this time inflating his cheeks confidently into the smoothness of realisation and without subsequent deflation.

A little dismayed silence had followed the "Phut," but this now gave way to a gratified murmur as the golden future of the Homes was painted in by the hand of the artist on the platform. It was indeed with a feeling of pained disgust that the audience listened impatiently to an old clergyman, who very earnestly raised the question of the rumour which had appeared in that man Plugg's paper to the effect that a large portion of the Happy Homes were inhabited by fallen women,

who paid the rents from the wages of shame. The result was indescribably painful.

A low murmur of indignation lifted itself "at the intrusion of such shocking matters into an ordinary business meeting." Mr. Spellbind looked at the aged sinner more in sorrow than in anger, and said, quietly, that even if such a shocking allegation were true, which Heaven forbid, were our erring sisters not to be given a bed to lie on? Was that the meaning of Christianity?

It was conclusive. The old man sat down, his dim blue eye showing apologetic doubt. And curiously enough it was this last incursion which definitely turned the tide in Mr. Spellbind's favour, the resolution to reconstruct being carried with only one dissentient, and those present clustering round the platform after the meeting to shake hands with the little man in the frock-coat who bent down with podgy fist to take hand after hand, his little eyes beaming. Jemmy, who had pulled off his right glove for the occasion, had managed to force his way to the front, being rewarded by a special: "You are a sensible man, Mr. Fontaine. You're putting your shirt on the Homes!" which sent him home in a state of exaltation such as one of Napoleon's young officers might have felt upon being made Field Marshal.

A council of war had gathered at Ash Villa to hear the result. There was Mrs. Fontaine and Aunts Bella and Maria, with Ginger skirmishing in and out of the room upon errands of the imagination, holding what might be called a sort of "watching brief" for herself. Finn had been admitted more or less on sufferance for, as the only person there with any first-hand knowledge of finance, his people despised his opinion as only the taker of quack medicine can despise the regular practitioner.

Jemmy's hand still tingled from the Spellbind recognition. His grey eyes shone as he spoke of that gentleman's eloquence, and indeed, it was not until Finn had asked the unpleasantly definite question: "Does that mean you have to find more money?" that the family, after first falling upon him as though he had spoken blasphemy, and then tacitly admitting the question, as is the way of families, sank into the colder depths of fact. Ginger, in the momentary silence which had followed Finn's question, had enunciated throatily but with a terrible



clearness: "Blarst that Buldger!" and had promptly been sent out of the room to adjust both her language and certain articles of attire, made of red flannel, which, as usual, hung in distress below her skirts. She retired with the sniff and hitch to which they were accustomed.

After this the conversation showed a tendency to wander from the point, recriminations, irrelevant and bitter, so absorbing the belligerents that Aunt Judy was able to insert herself through the door unnoticed and lay her nose between the strings of Mrs. Fontaine's little harp chair, sitting sideways upon which she looked at them as from behind bars. Jemmy now deeply depressed, his eyes glassy, remained silent under the double-handed attack of his wife and sister-in-law, the scar upon the latter's face twitching with a malevolent independence as she attacked him for his lack of enterprise and money. Aunt Maria, by gradually backing her chair into a corner, tried unavailingly to dematerialize. Finn, now a most difficult customer to handle, sat bolt upright in his chair, viperish, his green angry eyes anticipating the attack personal.

But as Jemmy said in a lull: "Haven't I tried books? Haven't I tried Beauty? Haven't I tried splatterdashers? What do you want me to try now?"

He looked piteously from face to face. His eyes trembled.

"Didn't I wear down two sets of Blakey's boot protectors the last two months over there in Walthamstow, and in all that length of houses there wasn't one to give me a cup o' tea, and" (he flushed as he said it), "if there had I wouldn't have taken it. Haven't I had me breeches torn twice and me little packet of books thrown after me three times?"

He turned from the defensive to the offensive: "What about the dogs? . . . tell me that. What about me corns? . . . tell me that. Why, God dash my buttons!" (Jemmy's most terrible oath), "haven't I tried safety razors an' pencils and Bibles an' sporty pictures with wicked women and maybe damned me soul and all? . . . haven't I, a teetotaller, with me blue ribbon in me button-hole tried beer an' cough mixture an' art vanish? . . . and wot about butter-nuts an' shredded toasties an' triple-extract of beef? . . . ain't I tried animal and vegetable? Ain't I dotty trying to sell things that nobody wants . . .?" And then to Finn's ter-

ror and sorrow his father broke down into sobs that shook him as though he had been a child.

Finn groped after the memory of something which it brought—and there came again the day of the hunger-line. It was the same protest, weak, unavailing, against life as it was lived.

Ginger, who had stolen in again to fetch an imaginary duster, which she metaphysically explained, “’ad been there when she was there before, but it ’ad been dark an’ she wasn’t quite sure . . .” relieved the situation and herself by saying in one of her audible whispers: “Blarst that Buldger!” which met with such a unanimous roar of disapproval that Jemmy’s shaking shoulders had time to recover their equipoise.

“Why can’t Finn stop his writing nonsense and earn some money like other young men?”

It was Aunt Bella who spoke, with that tremor in her voice which during the last year had been increasing. All eyes slewed round to Finn, who had been thinking as the others had talked.

He had been thinking of his hopeless struggle for journalistic recognition—the miserable pot-boilers—the odd five shillings he got for the news pars to which he sometimes descended—that high-water point of “The Imperialist” which paid him, sometimes, and when he could collect it, seven shillings and sixpence a column. There was Crux, the grey vista of the life of the city clerk, and Deirdre, to the hem of whose dress he did not dare to lift his eyes even though at heart he thought himself good enough for the Queen of Heaven. And there was that devil of a twisted girl who tormented him. There was that Socialism and those Socialist meetings in which he had not found himself or it—the compass of life for which he was searching. . . . It was into this that the question had inserted itself:

“Why can’t Finn stop his writing nonsense and earn some money like other young men?”

He was about to reply when there came a double knock on the street door which was immediately opened by a Ginger who had had eye or ear glued to the keyhole of the room during the whole of the conference.

A telegram.

The little golden envelope sent that thrill through them which such things always did. It was from Crux.

"Must leave for Black Rock immediately. Strike trouble. Crux."

Instantly all their troubles were forgotten. It was that "good Mr. Crux" and "the boy's fortune is as good as made." Everything was forgotten. In some unexplained way that telegram was going to change the fortunes of the Fontaines. If it had been a letter it would have meant nothing. But a telegram!

Finn alone was unmoved. He was beginning to learn his lesson of life.

## XXII

### SOULS RECALCITRANT

Finn returned to find Black Rock, not "fermenting," as Crux had put it, but dourly sure of itself. He had been met at Dunhallow by Johnny the Saint, who had greeted him with: "Glory be to God! but 'tis you have the makin's of a fine man, Masther Finn, yer honour."

It was always his franking into Ireland. If Johnny had not been at the station to meet him he would have felt that something was missing.

Kitty, who was crouched over the fire in the kitchen looking into the depths of her black teapot, refused to let him come near her, glancing up at him sideways in the crabbed way that she had. "You're too big," she said. "You're not a little boy any longer. You're a man. A nasty big man—bad luck to them, and may God forgive me for swearing and sure isn't it meself that ought to know them with their cavortings and their blandishments when they used to be round me them times I was known as Kitty the Divil, like bees round a honeypot. Sure, didn't they write verses, beautiful verses to me feet?" She looked down at her nobbly fundaments, complacent, "and what they said about me hair and eyes would fill a long book.

"Ah, g'long wid yez," she broke off indignantly, as she caught the look in Finn's eye, "you that ought to be ashamed to know about such things—ah, and let me tell ye, things that for all your laughing were wance worth lookin' at and throubled the rest of honest men; and sure wasn't there Mr. Asthar only the other day . . ." She struck her forehead with a free hand. "Ah, but what is it I'm sayin'? Sure, 'tis the divil that must still be in me. G'long wid yez! 'tis your fault," she said, as she made a distant pass at Johnny, who all this time had stood a little in the background, Finn's bag in his hands, all his love in his eyes. "G'long wid yez," she said again to

that unfortunate, "why can't you shave the moss off of your face like a decent Christian man?"

"Sure, didn't our Lord have it?" asked Johnny, simply.

The little angry eyes lighted up at him and dropped again into the teapot. Kitty the Divil crossed herself silently.

"You'll have a cup of tea, Johnny," said she. "I've made it hot and strong."

It was after tea that Father Con, in one of those friendly conversations, when the laughing priest could be more serious than any man he knew, had tried to advise him.

"Don't try to fight the Black Rock Turks, Finn, my boy. Don't be tryin' to imagine that because Mr. Crux is a big man in the great world that he is a big man in Ireland. Ireland has the way of making the little great, and the great, little . . . which, indeed, was the way of our Blessed Lord. Black Rock doesn't care a *traithnin* about Crux, though it won't be sayin' 'No' to his money. So don't try and fight them, Finn."

Finn smiled to himself as he heard the priest. Fight the Black Rock Turks? Fight those great swarth men who feared only God and devil. He was not that kind of fool. He left that to the Slicks and the Cruxes. Yet he knew that if he failed, Crux would either still keep him at his poverty-stricken wage or throw him out. And he was so tired of his poor clothes and of the repressions of poverty. They made him ashamed.

Crux's engineer, Busby, explained it all to him, in his high voice. "They don't like organisation," he said. "And as for 'speeding-up,' they don't understand it. I've speeded up Englishmen and Scotsmen and Welshmen—and, of course, I've done my bit on Americans—but these people here—they're uncivilised—they simply don't understand it . . . and I think they're dangerous," he added after a moment, as though something had just dawned upon him.

It seemed that the men with their womenfolk had reverted to the pre-Crux period, doing a little fishing and a little farming and a little salvage—with a little life-saving in between, for there were many wrecks on that iron coast. The Cruxian towers for smoking the herrings did not smoke, but stood in all their high square ugliness, like Crux's steam trawlers, deserted. Black Rock had gone back to its "hookers," turning its heavy fustianed back upon the blessings of Crux's steam. But though Black Rock didn't care for Crux's steam it still used his pier.

As for the chapel of the Primitive Christians Free—it stood up there shunned as though it had contained the Seven Plagues. There was not a cotter in Black Rock so poor or so low that he would take the Reverend Slick's loaves and fishes. As for Crux, if he could have visited Black Rock he would have had some curious lights thrown upon the Cruxian philosophy.

To Finn it all seemed a strange inconsequent echo of the increasing thunders of those rebel movements out there in the great world. Even here in nationalist Ireland, the last home of conservative patriotism, the echoes of democracy were making themselves heard. Politic and religion here as elsewhere were clashing and disintegrating and a new faith forming itself, nebulous, from the disintegration. Even Father Hennessey had been unable to force the members of his flock back to work for Crux, despite his threat of the terrors ecclesiastical. In vain had he pointed out the danger to their pockets in this world and to their souls in the world to come if they cut off the means by which the chapel of their faith might be repaired and that stained glass window placed behind the high altar. Deep in their hearts lay a faith indomitable over which even he was powerless.

They paid their church dues; they went to confession; they were docile to the teachings of their shepherd—but they would no more work for Crux than they would enter his tabernacle or accept his loaves and fishes. They were tired of civilisation.

Already Finn was discovering that Protestant North and Catholic South had begun to fraternise upon democratic labour platforms, losing something of the acerbity of religious outline in the process. Already, there had been what was known as the Maynooth revolt—the revolt of the younger clerics against the claims of the elder to decide their politics as their religion. “We'll take our religion from Rome, but our politics from hell or Constantinople!” one of them had said, and in the saying, as was the way in Ireland with its fateful phrase-making, had seemed to set the seal upon a new religion. And sometimes it came to him that Democracy everywhere was becoming a religion and like the others was developing, perhaps had already developed, its dogmas, its “authorities,” and, in a sense, its gods, which in its dawning it had called “Liberty, Equality and



Fraternity," and now was adding to them the Vote, with its Divine Right of Majority.

But behind the revolt of the fishermen, Finn quickly felt an invincible will. At the beginning, he had tried in a way, having no heart in his work, to bend Black Rock to Crux's will, but after a time the struggle had become very real—only that it had become a struggle not between him and Black Rock, but between him and the will that stood behind.

Upon his coming to the House of Dreams, where Mrs. O'Hara had received him with anxiety in her eyes and the shake-hands that was like a caress, where he had found Patsey as usual in his corner, his head heavy with dreams, he had also found Deirdre Asthar, a hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed Deirdre, with something of desperation in her look.

It was she who had matched herself against Crux and against Crux's lieutenant, as he learned from Father Hennessey, who was deeply indignant . . . "and she a heretic," he had said, forgetting Finn for the moment. It was she who had preached revolt, showing the fishermen how the contracts they had signed had put them in thrall to Crux. She had, it appeared, been holding meetings up in the deserted schoolhouse.

The Reverend Slick had responded with one of his periodical floods of tracts, but all in the way of business, which were as incomprehensible to the Black Rock cabins as though they had been written in Chinese, although, when faith was mixed with finance, Black Rock saw the humour of it.

To make matters still worse, everything connected with Crux was under excommunication. His engineers and his specially imported workmen could get neither bite of bread nor drop of water. When they addressed themselves to these queer people, they found them to be both deaf and dumb. The English workmen, decent, well-dressed, well-set up men, found to their astonishment that the very founts of feminine nature had dried, no girl of the village either speaking when spoken to or apparently being aware of male existence. Even in Dunhallow it was a matter of difficulty to get anything in the way of food, and all appeals to Crux's ally, Father Hennessey, were useless: "Arrah, don't be botherin' me!" this whiskey-loving prelate had said at last in flaring anger, as he rubbed up the red knobs in his high angry forehead with a red bandana handkerchief, "sure can't ye see I'm as helpless as yourselves with

these contrairy divils . . . and I don't blame them," he had added illogically.

That had always been the difficulty with the Irishman of any type. "You never knew where you had him," Mr. Busby, the engineer, said.

But to Finn there came all that old irritation as he felt the girl behind. The battle quickly developed into a personal struggle between him and Deirdre. After a time, almost forgetting the origin of the quarrel, he ignored the fishermen, who watched his efforts with that dark humour of the Southern Celt, fully aware that he hated the job and sympathising with him as fully, showing their personal esteem by bringing him all sorts of little gifts—newlaid eggs, a little "print" butter, and so on, and there where the tides roared around Carrickdhuv lying in mid-channel, risking their lives to get him seagull's eggs, of which to their unconcealed amazement he was very fond, getting Mrs. O'Hara to cook them for his breakfast.

Finn, at last, torn between love and hate for the girl who had defeated him, went back to London with failure writ large.

"Look at the money I have put into Black Rock—and for those people's good. I've put my faith and my money in this thing. Save them!" Crux had commanded, the steel jaw setting like a trap in the mechanism of the skull. "If you don't—you're fired."

## XXIII

### THE SOUL OF A NATION

When Finn next returned to Dunhallow, under April skies in which tear and smile blended, it was to the boom of drum and the pierce of fife. As his train ran across the tideway, he could see the white limestone roads under the warm April sun that disrobed itself gradually from its mists, checkered with the shapes of men walking, above their heads the emerald of banner and the gleam of golden cord, all converging upon one spot. It was from Johnny he discovered that "the country was up." It was all about a right of way leading from nothing to nowhere, a roundabout path which no one used or ever wanted to use, but from which old Asthar, who owned the property through which it ran, had turned an old peasant woman.

One of the Irish members had been expelled after raising the question first by tongue then by fist in the House of Commons, "a question," according to him, "not only of national import to Ireland, but to the British Empire, involving as it does . . ." The whole country was aflame with tar-barrels, whilst each night beacon fires on the high mountains ringed the island in a circle of flames.

Neither Father Con nor Kitty were at home. They, like everybody else, "had gone to the demonstration."

It all seemed trivial enough, only that Finn had learned one lesson in Ireland—that in Ireland it was never the apparent but the real that mattered—not the thing on the outside, but the thing behind.

This path, like so many other things in the island, was symbolic. It wasn't the path, nobody cared a thought for the path or even for old Asthar, it was for something that seemed to stand behind both. Johnny had said: "It isn't the path, Masther Finn, nor even ould Biddy Byrne" (that was the old

peasant woman), "we'd be carin' about—'t isn't for them that we're fightin'—but for Ireland." And his eyes had lighted up like those of Finn's father when he was roused about something.

Men, women and children surged past Father Con's house, headed by bands of men in green caps and sashes, blowing furiously into their fifes and beating their drums until the very sides of the houses gave back the dull reverberations. Irish terriers and mongrels of unknown breed skirmished through the riot. Man and animal, urged by some irresistible force, were pouring into the old grey square along the four streets which fed it like channels. Finn could no more resist that drag and thrust than the green tide running under the sandstone bridge could resist the drag and thrust of the moon. Presently he found himself sucked into the square as through a gullet. He might have been sucked into a great maw.

From where he stood perilously on the stone trough of the old pump in the middle of the square, before the stark timber platform with its drapings of green as though it had been a great altar, ringed by the emerald banners with the Irish inscriptions, he was able to see over the square, now a bobbing mass of heads and pinky faces and the white of eyeballs. Into this conglomeration there would every now and then surge from one of the four main roads leading into the place a current of men as a tide race runs into a harbour. And now the shrill of fife was mingled with the blare of brass rebellious, two bands marching in, one after the other, to circle the square in sheer flamboyance, the eyes of the cornetists staring, the ranks of the kettle drums rattling like machine guns, and above all the zoom of the big drum and smash of cymbals like the explosions of heavy artillery. Above, the sun shone down through the mists of the afternoon, shone upon all this yeasty humanity which seemed to ferment into new life under its rays.

It was as though the sun overhead, the author of all life, pulsing up there like a heart in the grey-blue skies of Ireland, sent with each pulsation its life-streams to earth, only to catch them up once more after they had done their work.

Every window in the square was living with faces. The green flags, hanging down from each window, quartered with colour the grey façades of the houses. And from out of that square pit, the boom of drum, the blare of brass and the shrill

of life, mingled with strident cheer and murmur of voices, went up to the heavens above like a prayer.

It came to Finn, not as a political demonstration, but as a service to some unknown God. And now the high green altar was filling with people, towering amongst them Father Con, who, as he looked, moved to the square boarded rostrum. And in that instant the murmuring of the crowd like the roar of sea upon rock was stilled.

He stood there under the shadow of the grey walls, bare-headed. And his lips moved as though in prayer, every head there uncovered before the soundless invocation. Finn, looking down upon that sea of heads, saw them as ranks of worshippers, their eyes fixed upon that tall figure as the Children of Israel might have looked upon Moses. The big priest bent over the edge of the rail and beckoned downwards to those on the platform behind. And as Finn looked, he saw the slight figure and the green dress with the tousled hair of bronze he knew so well.

It was Deirdre Asthar who had mounted to the railed space.

He could never remember the exact words of the bare-headed girl as she stood there with the sun shining upon her like a halo. He was conscious of the opening of the firm red lips, the steadily increasing pallor of the face—for she, like himself, was of the sort that pales under emotion—and of that all-enveloping silence about her. She was no longer Deirdre Asthar, the being of flesh and blood whom he loved, but a priestess, holy, sacrosanct.

To each affirmation of the slender figure on the platform came the answering affirmation from the crowd below like a great Amen, as though they were chaunting a litany. Again and again the great "Amen" swelled upwards, to be followed by a silence.

And then something had murmured through the crowd which began to sway in the sunlight. It stirred the hairs upon his head. And the murmur had changed to something deeper, menacing. And now the mass before him seemed to tremble as wave on wave of some silent resistless force came shuddering through it. And there had fallen another of those silences in which he could feel his heart beating in his veins as though it had been the heart of the great crowd of which he was now

a part, or of that still greater burning heart that hung in the skies above him.

It was when the silence had reached its deepest, as though the low solitary note of some great organ were breathing beneath, that there came from far away on the outskirts of the crowd a single voice. And it was this voice which seemed to loose the spirit that had been crouching under the silence. And then the note, taking volume, came like the rolling of thunder, with crash on crash of cheer like the smash of lightning when it strikes, until, at last, all the waters of sea and sky seemed to have run together as the figure on the high-railed space had disappeared.

Here was neither passion nor politic, but the Thing Behind all passion and all politic. Here was the soul of a people in travail—evolution itself. Not for the first time it seemed to Finn that all things ran together. Was it that Nationalism and Internationalism were but facets of the same diamond—that all these warrings of nation against nation and of class against class were not for the things for which the contestants believed they fought, but were simply urges from the thing behind?



## XXIV

### "THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER"

Finn drove out under the night skies to Mrs. O'Hara's, his heart aflame with new emotions. Above him, on distant Croagh Cromlech, the bale-fires after the demonstration blazed under a firmament of stars chastened by immense distance. He was both puzzled and angry—puzzled to find that a narrow nationalism should have power to move him, for by now Finn, who had come into closer contact with "the movement," as the left wing of democracy was being rather grandiloquently and exclusively called, had, under the administrations of the Reverend John Durring and Jock MacAdam, begun to have vague ideas about Internationalism.

Had he never gone to Ireland he might now have been a Socialist. But to him at least, nationalism and internationalism were not the complements but the opposites of each other. Even the Red Flag had not the power to thrill and hold that the Green Flag had. Yet one stood for a narrow, national God—the other for no God at all . . . unless there was an International God.

It was as though two powerful spirits were battling in his heart for its possession. From his seat on the side-car, looking out over the darkened waters of the bay, wraithed by the silvery mists of night, it seemed to him that Ireland was a sleeping breathing thing, calling to him in her dreams. She was a woman of dark eyes and tousled hair, calling to him: "Will you not give up the world for me? I am more than the world. Will you not come to me?" And then he saw it was the face of Deirdre Asthar.

He wanted to throw himself from the car down over the cliffs into the misty waters below and lose himself in the arms of his mistress.

On the road before them he saw a figure walking, its cloak

thrown back from its shoulders, its head bare. Very straight and slenderly it walked before them upon the highway, its hat in its hand. Under the witchery of the Irish night he could see, as the car drove past, two eyes that gleamed like stars looking straight before them. Sudden resolution came.

"Go back, Johnny, boy," he said to the driver. "I'll walk the rest." He sprang from the car, which drove back to Dunhallow.

He waited for the girl to come up to him, and said:

"I heard you speak in the square today and I wanted so much to tell you what I thought." There was something about her that made him want to throw himself upon the white limestone road before her.

The girl smiled at him a little, with that strange veiled look to which he was now accustomed. She did not speak.

"It was splendid, magnificent," he burst out. "Now I know why you love Ireland. I love her, too." He spoke with all the fresh impulse of the day upon him and with the magic of the night over all.

"Do you?" she said indifferently. "What will you give up for Ireland?"

"Give up?" he said stupidly, as though that had never come to him. He felt chilled and irritated. "What should I give up?"

"Give up what you call your Internationalism," she said.

"But that is to give up the world."

"If you won't give up the world for your country, your country doesn't want you," the girl countered. "Ireland is a proud mistress. She demands all."

Again there came the longing unreasoning to throw himself there on the white road before her—the longing to worship and to yield. The scent of her hair was in his nostrils, her beautiful presence enveloped him. He did not know whether it was Ireland or Deirdre Asthar he loved. In a way, they were one and the same thing.

A sea bird cried far beneath. The loneliness of life came to him poignantly. If this girl by his side would, could love him—he would not be afraid, although he had never thought of her loving him. He only thought of giving—not taking. He felt afraid up there on that road high over the sea as though he were on the roof of the world itself.

The moon began to rise over the lip of the sea, a moon of monstrous orange, a moon of passion and life. He looked into the blood-red heart of it and then at the girl, her eyes now misty under the new light. As she walked he could see the two firm breasts that showed themselves under the stuff of her dress. There was something in the night that was unbearable.

They were passing the place where she had once knelt over little Paudeen.

"Do you remember that day with little Paudeen?" he asked, turning to steal a glance at her. She looked at him, fleetingly, surprised. "It was that day, as you bent over him that something snapped in my heart. It was that day that I first glimpsed Ireland and what she meant to me. And it was through you that I glimpsed her . . ." He waited, fearing. This girl could be so unresponsive.

A figure had risen from the grey stone where Paudeen's mother had laid him that day. It limped over to them with the little deep blackbird chuckle he knew so well and a "Good evening, my dears!" It was Stella Fay, who was again in Ireland.

"I had come out for a walk to see the rising of the moon," she said. "How did the meeting go, Deirdre?"

The girl was silent.

"It went splendidly," Finn answered. "It was the best demonstration I have ever seen." But he wondered whilst he said it, whether she had heard.

"What? Better than those Tower Hill and Trafalgar Square things?" said Stella. "Surely that splendid Internationalism of which lately you are never tired of talking, can beat a miserable little nationalist meeting in a little Irish town!" Her words were mocking.

Finn walked between the two girls, feeling angry at both, and at himself. There was a new note in Stella's voice. It was like the hissing of a man when he sets his dog at another dog.

But the girl with the hair of copper walked at his side with that curious glide as though unconscious. She had, in the preceding months in London, been making rather fierce love to him . . . or perhaps it was he who had been making fierce love to her. That, he could never decide, for she had a way of coming forward as the hunter and drawing back as the

hunted, filling him with desire intolerable, although since that day when she had drawn the child from the sea they had never kissed. When he was alone with Deirdre, this girl seemed disgusting to him. When by himself, he alternated between savage longing and repulsion. When with both of them together he hated both.

As they came to the opening into the breen, all at once he missed Stella from his side, and, as he paused, uncertain, he heard her mocking laugh from the other side of the red hawthorn with its scented blossom, behind which she had slipped. It was one of her queer ways, elfish of the twilight, for at night this strange creature seemed to take on new vitality; new lights would come into those grey eyes, and she loved at these moments to play tricks on him.

"She must have gone to swim under Carrickmore," he said to Deirdre, who stood silently by. "She is quite tireless in the water. She has no fear. She swims there every night, going out into the deep sea, although she has been warned of the tides by the fishermen who since that day she saved Paudeen, worship her." And then he flushed, remembering that day of the saving of little Paudeen and Deirdre's terror.

She said nothing, but her face gleamed like a white flower in the starshine that sifted through the hawthorn blossoms.

Finn looked at her and caught the pallor of her face. It filled him with a great pity.

"I didn't mean that," he stammered, all the blood of his body rushing to his face.

He found the girl looking at him in astonished anger, her head held proudly up and back a trifle.

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said. "Do you?" she added in cold insult.

"You never seem to think I know anything," Finn said, the blood flying from his cheeks at her insult. Out of the distance came a mocking laugh. Something was urging him on. And now the blood had come back to thunder in his ears.

"You have always disdained me or laughed at me since that day when I first saw you at Thrum's. You think I am not good enough for you. You despise my poverty. You have tried to make me ashamed . . ."

He paused an instant to catch those eyes fixed on him with a

look that was full of something—a message suppressed. But he would not listen to the eyes. He went on:

"You despise me because I am an Internationalist—because I stand up for the common people." (But he knew as he said it that he was uncertain both about the one and the other.) "You pity your puny nationalism of one country," he felt very mean as he said it, "against the world. I am bigger than you," he said, grandiloquent. "My country is the world, and as for my God . . ."

"My God," put in the girl quietly, as he paused, "is a national God, not a thing of no nation." Her eyes gleamed metallic in the moonlight as though it had shone on the wing of a beetle.

"You talk of your nation," he said angrily, forgetting all his impressions of the day. "Do you know I never heard any Irishman either at Dunhallow or here in Black Rock say a word for Ireland until to-day in the square. When I have spoken to them about nationality they have been either silent or laughing. Their nationality is a thing of the moment—a thing of passion and impulse, a thing of *unconsciousness*." He had broken off in savage triumph at that last word as though it were annihilating. She was unconscious. Ireland was unconscious. He, he, Finn Fontaine, was conscious.

And then she had turned to him and had said in low, sure tones, as though she were speaking to herself: "Perhaps you are right. I had never thought of that. And you—you have not learned that the unconscious life of a nation is its deepest life. Was there not one who said: 'Let Ireland apostatise for a thousand years; let all her sons and daughters hold their silence when you speak to them of nationality; let them, like Judas, sell their Lord—that is, their birthright—for thirty pieces of silver . . . and then, even then, they will awake from their dream and the unconscious will rise above the threshold of consciousness to confound the world.'" Her eyes shone. "And you know, Mr. Fontaine," she had added with her little cold smile: "You have been calling yourself an Irishman, but you have been trying to sell your countrymen to Crux for a little more than thirty pieces of silver—for two pounds a week. I think Judas must have been an Irishman."

And so, under the shadow of the House of Dreams, she had turned and left him. He found himself alone, looking into the

eye of the great yellow moon as, now a gold-laden argosy, it swung out of the sea above the neighbouring hill.

He plunged down the borean into the silver and black of the night, hurt, angry. His mind was a riot of idea—the riot in which Deirdre Asthar so often left him.

So what had come from lips only in a moment of anger was true. She had despised his non-success, and with that degenerate self-pity into which he even now could sometimes sink, he held out one gaunt arm against the sky, threatening heaven with his poverty. But he would show her. He would succeed. He would succeed because he hated her and was finished with her.

And he was finished with Crux. That astonishing resolution came to him there under the night skies. He was finished with all that shadow-dance of millions—finished with the city and with its dirty commercialism. He was not a business man. He, he, Finn Fontaine, was an artist! He shouted as resolution came to him.

Ireland. What was Ireland to him? Ireland was Deirdre Asthar. He was finished with both. Again he shouted out into the night challenging high heaven with his raised fist. For the moment he was outside himself.

Internationalism or Nationalism? What did they matter? He stood for neither the one nor the other. He stood for Finn Fontaine. He was going to force those surging thoughts of his out into the world at the point of his pen. He would write what Thrum wanted. "The Earth" was to be his channel, as the earth was to be his goal.

He had plumbed the depths of a girl's heart. It was shallow. She had called him "Judas." "Judas." He repeated the word aloud. Well, he would be Judas. But he would not sell himself for thirty pieces of silver—he would sell himself for gold and for power. If there was to be a God to worship, and even in that moment, tensioned and slightly ridiculous as it was, he was not such a fool, he said to himself, as to say there was no God, it should be a God of Gold and Power.

What a fool he had been. He had disdained delights and lived laborious days—for what? He had disdained the girl with the bright hair and the scarlet lips. He had taken her lips—that once—but not herself. He had kissed her that day



down by the waters and like a baby he had let her make love to him in London. He would not only kiss.

And he laughed. Laughed as though he had thrown something from his back in that moment. Some burden. He was free.

He was passing blindly down along the bottom of the valley where the grass grew high by the running water under the softness of the April night, when he heard an echo of his laugh, and even before he saw her, caught the perfume of her body.

She was on him silently as was her custom and she laughed again, crouching under his shoulder and looking up at him in the way that she had. She wore a dress in one piece of the colour and texture of a grey wrinkled poppy that, cut away from her neck, left her skin shining like white satin under the golden moon. The glint of the moonshine was caught in the great knot of hair done low on the nape. She clung to him as she slid her arm through his and as she pressed his arm she laughed low again.

They were alone in the valley save for the full-throated call of a song-bird from the solitary grove above them, and the speckled foxgloves hung their bells as they passed.

Her hand was like fire on his arm. Her head against his side seemed to burn him. And yet he had not spoken—nor had she.

And now her feet, like his, were laggard on the green lush grass, and they had stopped for her to slide her other hand up and around his neck to pull him down to her. He felt her breath like a flame upon his cheek and the warmth of her body came through her thin dress as she clung to him.

The place was very still. But some night insect was chirping somewhere in the grass, like the tick-tack of one of Patsey's fairy cobblers, whilst from the meadow above there came the soft cooing of the wood doves and the lower ventriloquial note of a cuckoo. The trickle of the water in his ears and the scent of the early flowers and grasses, to mingle with that scent which might have been the perfume of her clothes or the essence of herself.

Her face turned up to his under the full moon, the scarlet of the lips parted, inviting. She had pulled his great shoulders down over her where they stood under an ash that grew

lonely in that spot. And his lips had sought hers to cling together in an ecstasy of living.

She was twining herself about him and he was losing himself in the perfume of her hair and her melting flesh, in that fire and snow that lay in his arms, when from the shadows above where the House of Dreams clung to the lip of the valley, there came the sound of a lute with a voice singing:

Come, dear heart, where the shadows play  
Out in the mists of yesterday.  
Come, dear heart, where the shadows fall. . . .

The girl in his arms had trembled as the voice stole down to them and then had nestled still closer, covering his lips and eyes with her kisses as though to keep out the sound. Her eyes were closed, her lips sought his again and again, the long slender arms wound themselves about him. His senses were clouding, when the voice came again:

Come, dear heart, where the shadows creep  
To the twilight edge of to-morrow's sleep . . .

He struggled a little in her arms. But she would not. She laid them about him and pulled his head down still closer to her. He felt the anæsthesia of the night stealing over him, lulling him to forgetfulness, when low and sweet the voice came again, pulsing downwards through the night:

Come, dear heart, on the shadows' flight  
As we whisper together the last Good-night. . . .

The voice was calling to him from up there. He could not bear it.

With a last effort he had freed himself from the girl, who, panting, love-sick, looked at him with heavy languorous eyes.

And then he had fled into the night.

## XXV

### IN THE MELTING POT

After that night in the valley, Finn felt that once more he had been flung into the melting pot of doubt from which he thought he had escaped. All the foundations upon which he had been building had fallen away. There was not a foot of firm foothold under his feet.

More than ever before was he like that piece of bait in the deep waters under Carrickmore. Ireland had called to him and he had lost her. Democracy had called, and because of Ireland he had not responded. The faith of Father LeStrange, like the faith of his parents, held nothing—no, not that, but it only held *something* for him—it did not hold all, and he demanded all or nothing of faith as of people. The things he wanted to love he hated—and the things he hated he sometimes loved. From those first days when as a little child he had begun to think of God and of life, life and God had eluded him. Sometimes it almost seemed to him that neither the one nor the other existed. That life, like God, was a mirage.

He had not even the poor satisfaction of yielding himself to the pleasure of life. He could no more yield himself to Stella Fay than he could win the love of Deirdre Asthar, whom he hated and loved together. He was the lone inhabitant of a sort of No Man's Land, doomed to lonely misery of soul and body—for these two things he could not separate.

After he had gone back to London and, with the instincts of the devil turned monk, as Stella Fay had put it mockingly, had tried to lose himself amongst the Universalists, at the time when he believed that at last he had found an ark for his faith, he had once more been flung wild by one of those apparently trifling things which so often proved decisive for him.

He had been at the headquarters in Piccadilly and through

the door opening into the Temple, which hitherto had always been kept religiously closed, had been watching that bull-man, Buck Cronstairs, trying with clumsy fingers to arrange the flowers in the vases and upsetting the contents in his well-meant efforts. Ström, who had just finished a six months' course of pine-nuts, and who was in consequence vibrating a trifle thinly, had come in with his babies under his arms, bringing to Finn the interrogation which had so often overtaken him in that temple of cranks—why was it that excellent people who lived on nuts and water for their own or for Christ's sake were often so obviously inferior in one way or other to people who smoked, drank and ate meat? It was once more that eternal contradiction inherent in things.

Ellen Masters, who had come out from the Temple, clad in that white woollen garment which made her look more than ever like a priest, was approached by the Swede, who shyly drew the hoods from his statues, which Finn saw were very beautiful and curious.

He held them out to her dumbly.

She looked at them indifferently and thanked him, but said: "You know I don't care for them, as I said before. I much prefer . . ." She broke off. "Why can't you do something like 'The Mother' over there?" She pointed at the plaster horror of the statue Finn had seen that first day.

The Swede had said nothing but had covered his darlings once more and silently left the place. And again Finn could see the dust shaken from the sandalled feet.

This had both raised and explained all sorts of questions. If it were possible for Ellen Masters to mistake fifth-rate art for the real thing—where was the value of the spiritual light of which her followers boasted? A great spirit, Christ for example, would not make that mistake. It would understand everything and, first of all, art. Yet Ellen Masters was a great spirit. Even now he could not deny that. It was, again, vastly puzzling.

This shaking in his slowly formulating convictions had increased as he overheard a conversation one day between that lame young man whom, with his crutches, he had met in the lift the day of his first visit and the white-haired young woman who had once told him that "between Universalism and the Universalists there was a great gulf fixed." The lame man

had said: "It is the Universalists who will kill Universalism as the Christians have killed Christianity . . . perhaps I am the only Universalist." And he had laughed. He had gone on: "Universalism, like Catholicism and Protestantism before it, is already in process of crystallisation, and it will give way to a new religion, the central point of which will be 'consciousness,' without dogma, for dogma, basically, is unconsciousness. It will be the religion of 'Conscious Democracy' without temple or priest and it will erect its altars to the Unknown God, in temples not made with hands." Something had stirred in Finn at the words, which came to him as a memory. Paris Asthar had once said that.

The lame man had finished with that indulgent humour of his, as he hobbled away on his black-rubbered crutches: "The Universalists are always talking about 'eternal principles.' The gods don't care a damn for eternal principles—there *are* no eternal principles!"

But for Finn, during the three years that followed his leaving Crux, to that gentleman's disgustful astonishment, the world about him was fast changing from grey to rose-red. From the moment when that stream of articles on Ireland, which he had written after his quarrel with Deirdre Asthar that night on the road from Dunhallow, had appeared in "The Earth," the articles which marked his surrender to Thrum, everything had gone well with him.

For that three years, he went from strength to strength, losing himself in the fevers of Fleet Street, all doors opened to him and his pen winning the golden rewards of the successful journalist. His book on Ireland he had, of course, long since abandoned, leaving the MS. in a drawer. The quarterlies had invited him to contribute his opinions upon Ireland after Thrum had given them in his papers the prominence which he alone could secure, and his name was constantly being quoted in leading dailies as "that sane young Irishman, Finn Fontaine," or "that smart young journalist."

If he could only have prevented himself thinking, he would have felt himself happy, basking in gratified recognition.

He was now well-dressed. His soft green wide-awakes had even set a fashion amongst rising journalists, and as he went, his tall broad-shouldered figure was one of the sights of Fleet Street, the most admired by the youthful adventurers there.

There were of course flies in the unguents of success. And there was his father, who was getting tottery, with a tendency to faintings. He was now selling or trying to sell a new encyclopædia, the weight of which was causing varicose veins to swell in his legs. It was a great shame, and although Finn tried to help his now admiring people from time to time, his money seemed to be swallowed up in the insatiable maw of that man Spellbind, who at this time was swelling prodigiously both in person and bank balance. With his dropsical swellings he had always looked as though he had water on the brain. Now it was his stomach which seemed full of water, giving to it the flatulence of a corpse. At last Finn had refused to help any more.

And he had lost his dear little grandmother, who, one day, praying for him, was unable to rise from her knees and, for the first time, had to be assisted up the three steps of ascent to the great bed. And there, full of years, she had passed away some days later, singing her quavering hymns to the last and blessing and praying for Finn and all about her. Her very last words had been for him—the apple of her eye.

She had been lying with two big pillows to prop her up in the bed, her thin wrinkled hands smoothing the coverlet, tremulous, a wisp of grey coming from under her nightcap. And she had said to him, as the evening sun came westering through the window to fall upon the dim blue eyes that searched the golden glory of the September heavens: "Finn, boy, Finn." He had turned at the low pleading voice. "Come, alannah, and put your arms around me." And he had done so.

"Oh, Finn, I'm goin' from you and from Jemmy and all. But Finn, avick," and she had looked long and earnestly at him, a sort of radiance shining from behind the eyes, "I will still be prayin' for ye and lovin' ye where I am going. Death cannot kill prayer or love. For love is everything." And then she had smiled pleasantly at him and had said, low, distinct: "God is love."

She had sighed in his arms like a very tired child and so had fallen asleep.

It had affected him very much at the time and indeed had plunged him into a sort of misery, in which his old thoughts about God had once more surged up within him. Not that he had ever forgotten them altogether or ever believed that he



could shut out God by refusing to think of him. But they had come to trouble him, and with them had come a sort of poignancy—about Deirdre Asthar and about Ireland. Yet, both these things he thought he had put out of his heart forever.

But that had passed. As he said it to himself: "The virtue had gone out of him."

He had, however, the strangest lapses, over which he seemed to have no control. There were moments when the face of Deirdre Asthar would come to him to arouse him to violent despair, when it took all his strength of will to shut her out and himself to peace again. And for the girl with the copper hair he had moments when he felt a disgust to her as though she had been some noxious animal—moments that came to him when least expected, even in the approachings of hot desire. It seemed always that contact or nearer approach made him hate her, and that moment of the valley had never returned.

But perhaps this was because Paris Asthar, with that perversity which distinguished him, was always urging him to surrender himself to Stella.

He had with a certain insistent suavity of his own, which indeed was entirely logical, shown Finn that the suppression of natural instinct was in itself unnatural; that above all it was the chaste man who had not the right to refuse himself to some poor woman to whose own development he was necessary, and had generally comported himself as a very gentlemanly pander indeed.

But Finn also had a perversity, which made him refuse just because Paris Asthar wished it. As for Paris, his splendid appearance was fast transforming, he seemed to be falling in on himself, a splendid ruin of a man, and even his half sister was gradually withdrawing herself from him.

Stella Fay he had met constantly. She seemed to have forgotten that night in the valley, and save for the little mocking smile that haunted her lips, he might have thought that he had dreamt it. Only she no longer made love to him, but seemed to hold herself afar off, watching for something. They were excellent comrades and had visited all sorts of queer places together, including the great grey stone church in Kensington known as "The Church of the Beautiful," the only

church in the world without a head as Stella was careful to inform him. It was the last thing in nebulousness.

It was one of the numerous sects in which she was always dabbling and into which she seemed, at the beginning of each new experiment, to plunge herself with zest, real or assumed. Down at Forestford, they had once had a black cat which, even when long past the vagaries of kittenhood, would, as night came on, run about the grass of the little back garden like a mad thing, rushing up into the top of the two fruit trees and hiding herself in impenetrable positions from which she would dart out upon an unsuspecting world. Ginger had said the devil was in Semolina—the name she had given her—and would add in her dreadful East-end slang that “she was balmy on her crumpet.” Stella Fay often reminded him of that cat.

This church remained long in Finn’s memory, because it seemed to be typical of so many of the new sects and cults that were at this time springing up everywhere in London, and, indeed, throughout the world. Behind it was that atmosphere of riches and “fashionable faith” which he had learned to associate with a certain type of autocracy. Its congregation, like so many of the Universalists themselves, like their horses and carriages, were richly upholstered. They seemed to play with spirituality as a child plays with a new toy, though even Finn, now fine-edged critically, was not prepared to say that they did not feel something of what they professed.

The Church of the Beautiful was a noble building, the high slender spire of which hung like a white shadow behind the trees of Kensington. In the centre, was a whispering gallery from which the pure sound of boys’ voices spiralled down to the congregation beneath. Around the walls, indifferently, were statues of Christ, Buddha, and Minerva, and instead of hymns the concealed singing, luscious and ethical, was from the poems of Swinburne and Shelley. The whole thing was really very well done.

He discovered later that instead of a head, this church had a sort of Inner Council of Three, presided over by the man who was called “The Founder,” the name of whom was never disclosed. Nobody ever knew who the founder really was. Some said that “The Founder” was the man who had founded the Church, a man of enormous wealth—others that he was

changed each year, his identity being known alone to the Council.

It was all very mysterious and cloudy and, of course, "beautiful," that word which was always making its appearance in the literature and singing. Not that its adherents were debarred from admixtures to that principle of beauty, which, vaguely, they were supposed to worship—if they wished to add their own private gods they could do so—and of course they did wish. But between the Universalists and the members of the Church Beautiful, as it was sometimes called, there was feud none the less deadly in that it was carried on in the politest and most forgiving manner.

So far as Finn could see, this was but a reflex of the world as a whole, that world which was in a state of spiritual disintegration, tending to a certain vagueness in religion, confusing it more and more with politics as with patriotism. Wave after wave seemed to be passing across it, and the foundations of belief, like his own, seemed to be in the melting pot. Each day the newspapers were filled with semi-humourous articles about Lanthorn and his Borderland Bureau, only that now, despite the frantic and not altogether scientifically dignified protests of men like Professor Dust, bewildered, Sir Lancaster Hogge, squawky, and another rationalist professor—roaring, these articles were gradually losing their humourous tinge and, whilst holding themselves editorially circumspect, there seemed to be a trend, under the public demand for more of Lanthorn's "facts," although these facts were still always inverted commaed, to permit them to be regarded with some seriousness. "Spooks," materialising, were now becoming "ghosts" in the daily paper. Soon they would attain the full dignity of matter and become "matter of fact" as Asthar had put it in an article in the "Contemporary."

An archdeacon in the church had boldly come out on the side of spiritualism—or, as he said, "on the side of the angels," a phrase that was beginning to be used by the most varied types of people. The bishops were in a constant state of shock and alarm, not knowing how to orientate themselves to the new tendencies, or, as the Bishop of Whitechapel said, in one of his bewildered fulminations, "what to do for the best."

The Reverend Slick, however, repulsed at Black Rock, was

at the Kensington Rotunda going stronger than ever, keeping all London awake with his howlings—with Big Business booming behind.

To add to the confusion, Sir Raymond Hilary, whose distinguished investigations as physicist into the new atomic theory, largely inspired by the discovery of radium, had compelled his brother scientists to recognise him by making him President for the year of the British Association, had come out and shocked the very foundations of their beliefs by declaring, positively and even pugnaciously, that life and identity persisted after death, giving his proofs and defying refutation. This had caused amongst his fellow-scientists very much the same feeling that a Spanish Grand Inquisitor might be supposed to have felt at the denial by a cardinal of the Immaculate Conception. But there the challenge stood—and the man in the street at any rate, just beginning to find interest in such speculations, seemed to think that Sir Raymond so far had had the best of the argument, which somebody signing himself "Lucifer, Son of the Morning," had done his best alternately to back up and laugh at in the "Contemporary." It was Paris Asthar, of course.

Even the immemorial placidity of the religions of the East seemed to be feeling something of these new disturbances. They had begun to flood the materialist West with their pamphlets and expositions, and Srî Kapila, the Indian Finn had met at "The Cloisters," had been holding a series of lectures in the West end of London to packed houses, declaring that the East was breaking its long silence and indifference to propaganda to convert the West. Of course the papers laughed at him, but large and increasing numbers seemed to be taking him seriously.

On the other hand, it was quite evident that these movements so far were confined to minorities, the great mass of Europeans being either indifferent or hostile, and from all sides arose the complaint that Europe was fast sinking into the slough of the material, with its motto: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die."

With all this went the ever-increasing growth of prophecies of a Great War, coming from the most contradictory quarters. Even men so widely divorced as Paris Asthar and Father Lestrange said that such a war was inevitable, and for one

purpose only—the saving of Europe from her materialist hog-trough and the tearing down of the veils between the worlds of the seen and the unseen, now wearing thin. It was what these people had always said.

The European statesmen, both of Germany and France, as of England and Austro-Hungary, constantly foreshadowed the struggle in speech and article, although in veiled phrases, as did the platforms of democracy. The pulpits were full of vague denunciations of the profligacy of the times and of the Armageddon that should follow them. Finn himself, an atom in all this stir, dipped his pen deep and wrote about it as did hundreds of other journalists, who felt that such a war would in some unexplained way come as a relief. Like millions of others he expected, and wanted, something to happen. He scarcely knew what. But something. Europe was like a woman about to travail—to bring forth . . . what? It was a feeling of tension unbearable—the feeling of something inevitable.

## XXVI

### "GOD OF BATTLES"

Something else that jagged Finn like an old wound was the constant impulse, despite his success, to attend, furtively, the big labour meetings now being held under the advance of the rising Democracy, where he had been considerably puzzled at the varying outlooks of the leaders, who seemed to embrace all types from "idealists" like Jock MacAdam to materialists like Red Borb.

Another thing that puzzled was the thing which had first struck him that day of the unemployed procession—the curious trend of Democracy to religion—its habit of using bible quotations on its banners and a religious terminology or phrasing on its platforms and in its pamphlets. It was gradually coming to him that what was called "Democracy" was really a new world-religion, and somebody had written of it that like other faiths it was developing its priests and its dogmas.

He had been sent by Thrum to interview MacAdam prior to a mass meeting of the unemployed, which at this time was thought to herald open rebellion, and, incoherently enough, was much distressed when MacAdam had looked at him from under his shaggy brows to say: "I wonder, Mr. Fontaine, that you care to serve the devil!"

It distressed him out of all relation to its importance, perhaps because he had never been able entirely to get that procession of unemployed out of his head. He could sometimes see it, blind, swinging through the fogs into the heart of the red sun.

Thrum was now gathering his haunches under him for one of his periodical "springs," in each one of which he usually managed to engulf a competitor. He was beating the big drum against Germany and making the press of the world, as its chancelleries and parliaments, resound with his noise. Gradually this pæan of praise and hate was resolving itself



into a glorification of Nationalism and a damnation of Internationalism. It had puzzled Finn very much at the time, because Thrum's nationalism had seemed to be the exact antithesis of that nationalism he had met in Ireland. He was even beginning to speak in "The Earth" about "God and the British Empire." The Almighty figured constantly in his leaders.

Finn was now looked upon by Thrum as one of his best men. He reserved him for all his big "stunts," as they called them at the office. He now wanted him to write what he called "a picturesque account" of the biggest stunt he had hitherto attempted—the private meeting of delegates which was to be the preliminary to the formation of an International Peace Union which, upon the threat of war then materialising, would, in the various European countries hold mass meetings of protest and initiate united pacifist action.

There were to be at this preliminary meeting only a score of delegates—that is, representatives of the world's peace societies as of those of Labour and Socialism. Even the Churches, those disciples of Christianity militant, had been invited to send half a dozen delegates. The proceedings of the meeting were to be secret, for the organisers were afraid of the laughter of a scornful and practical world.

Finn had no right to be there. It was Thrum's idea. With that admirable imagination which had given the great journalist the position he occupied, he had promptly formed a "Peace" society of prominent friends, for the purpose, as he said, of holding a watching brief upon the pacifists. They were too prominent to be denied representation, and he had sent Finn as their delegate. By this means, "The Earth" would be the only paper to have a report of the proceedings. It would be one more "scoop."

It was about 11 of a thundery August morning when Finn entered the London headquarters of the Workers' Party, where the meetings were to be held. It was a rather heavy room, pictureless and bare, with a board table on trestles standing bleakly across the centre, there being a large chair in the middle with smaller chairs fringing the rest of the table. Two long curtainless windows let in a stray light, which, however, only served to accentuate the utilitarian gloom of the place to which some relief was given by a gleam of silk

in the corners where Democracy had left its banners after some demonstration. Directly behind the big chair, however, stood a banner of smoky red, on it, in gold lettering: "Workers of the World—Unite!"

He slipped into the vacant chair at the end of the table and looked at the men and women either entering the room or already seated. Once more he was held by the astonishingly diversified types of the new democracy.

A dusky-haired girl in the early twenties came through the door with a young man who might have been her lover—both of them obviously aristocrats. Her hair, done low on her neck and her long limbs set off by a rather close-fitting skirt, reminded him of Stella Fay, only that the lightsome eyes had another expression. She had a jaw and Finn thought looked apt to be difficult.

The man he took to be her lover was a slender determined idealist of a transition stage when men of the upper and middle classes were showing themselves singly side by side with the rising Democracy—apparently a University man. There was something spiritually impressive about the slender figure, the fine head, and the mobile, clean-shaven mouth, but Finn, looking at him, said to himself that he lacked something—perhaps passion. And in a sense Finn was right about a man who was not humanly exciting any more than Christ would have been humanly exciting had he appeared in the Twentieth Century. There was a naturalness about him, however, which drew Finn.

The big, loose-framed Irishman who followed the man and girl Finn knew by sight. That was Durgan, the Direct Actionist. He knew him for a man who could be obstinate, pugnacious, and even brutal in his fanaticism, although there was about him something beautiful, though fated. He was the man of whom the Archbishop of Canterbury had once written in the columns of "The Times" that in him was an evil spirit, a theory eagerly though riotously upheld by Paris Asthar who, in a long letter, had made out an excellent case for "possession."

Ellen Masters, dressed in white muslin, already sat at one end of the long table, looking with her heavy jowl and wise saggy eyes like some great intelligent lioness, very conscious, and very dangerous.

In the chair, already declaiming in a voice of anæsthesia,

a large soft-looking man was addressing his audience as though they had been a congregation and the chair a pulpit. It was a voice to which Finn had become accustomed from his frequent attendances at Labour meetings.

On one side of the Chairman sat Adolph Gutenmann, the German Socialist chief, whose heavy white walrus moustache, round spectacles, and rubicund face were known at every congress table in Europe. On the other, Sylvester Vallon, his friend the enemy, his natural opposite, whose eyes behind their darkened glasses gave him something of the gaze of the half-blind man whose eyes are fixed beyond earthly horizons.

And now the chairman, who was one John Bluett, a perfectly honest, perfectly tame, member of the Labour Party and a lay preacher, was going on in a fashion that was at once balmy and slightly condescending as though he were at a prayer meeting. . . . "We have gathered here to-day, friends, for a great purpose, a solemn purpose—the abolition of war from the—ahem!—" giving a loose rein to his imagination—"universe." Then followed the usual string of platitudes to which Finn had become inured from John Bluett and his like, in which the words "open mind" occurred at regular intervals. The blue eyes became misty as the speaker went on:

"I remember when I was a little boy at Sunday-school we used to have a hymn in which we sung about the beauty of the earth 'From Greenland's icy mountains, to India's coral strand,' and in which, if my memory serves me correctly, we were accustomed to say that 'only man was vile.' Although I do not see before me either Greenlander or Indian, I believe that the hymn is suitable to the present international gathering . . . ." Here, under a dubious "ahem!" from another delegate, the chairman, who reminded Finn of his Aunt Maria, showed a tendency to wander from the point, tried to save himself, stuttered, stumbled, and finally extricated himself from the mess of his thinking by plunging into a generally devout hope that "under the blessing of Providence our efforts to-day may result in the nearer coming of that day when the sword shall be beaten into the ploughshare and the spear into the pruning hook."

It was not what the man said so held the attention of Finn Fontaine, but the way in which he said it—that queer tendency

in modern politic to introduce religion and even to couch the political message in the language of orthodoxy. Again and again this was brought out in the remarks of those who followed. Once more it came to him that Asthar, who had so often said that the day war broke out in Europe the gods would be fighting on either side above the protagonists, was perhaps using something more than the language of phantasy.

This was religion, not politic. Perhaps there was no politic.

This showed itself once more in the speech of the man who had followed the soft-faced chairman. He was the tall, raw-boned Irishman, bitter as only a Southern Irishman can be, though his was actually but a protest against the religious note. It was there when in a strong passage he said: "I will tell you, Mr. Chairman, for what we have *not* come here to-day—to hold a prayer meeting. The time for prayer is past—the time for action come. You have quoted Providence as I have heard it quoted at every Labour Congress I have ever attended—one of our democratic specialties is Providence and politics—and after all our providential politics through a century, where do we stand to-day, I ask ye? . . . on the edge of fratricidal war, in which comrade will slaughter comrade in the name of the very God you profess to serve . . . " and then he had added, bitterly: " . . . he is still the God of Battles.

"You have quoted your Sunday-school—well, mine used to tell me that God helped those who helped themselves; but the master of tactics, your master and mine, said that Providence was on the side of the big battalions. I believe that. We have right and we have might. We have the big battalions of democracy to prevent the bloody war now being talked of throughout Europe. We have had enough talk. Now let us have action.

"Ye talk of God!" (He said it with a savage contempt.) "Well, if there is a God of Peace, there is also a God of Battle—it stands in the book you have just quoted—and he is perhaps the God of the Red International, the International of Blood which is to replace that other capitalist International of Gold, which in its turn replaced that other of Birth—the International that is beating into us workers the lesson that

combination is the price of life as it is the price of peace. For combination means domination. . . ."

"And domination, damnation," inserted glibly one of the delegates, a lanky young man who had just glided into an empty chair and whose hair, parted in the centre and coming up into horn points, gave him something of a benevolent satyr. It was, as Finn recognised, Mr. Lancelot Fitz, the pacifist whose tongue and pen were dipped in oil and vinegar and who was known as "The Gamin," who, as Paris Asthar once said, respected neither God nor man but loved both."

"And domination, damnation," he had said.

"Dominate or be damned!" said the big Irishman, heavily. "You talk about your meaningless labour resolutions and your God of peace in every congress hall. Why, every congress hall. . . ."

" . . . every congress hall is the temple of the Great Majority—the Majority Eternal, and you believe in the rule of the majority—not the minority. *Vox populi, vox Dei*," bantered Fitz.

"Hear-hear! Hear-hear!" ejaculated the chairman, piously, forgetting the neutrality of chairmanship.

"Always remembering that the minority is only right for the time—the majority, never," put in Fitz with the flippancy that he had made his own.

"And I *do* believe in the majority," went on the Irishman stubbornly, "but even the majority is powerless in face of war—of the Moloch that demands his meat to-day as he demanded it three thousand years ago in Carthage. It is the majority which to-day, or to-morrow, in face of the threat of war, is without policy. . . ."

A voice came from the end of the table in quiet challenge: "Where is *your* policy?"

The big man drew himself up, triumphant: "The sword of the strike."

"A sword with two edges that cuts both ways," came in low distinctness the voice of an old man from his place under the lee of the big Irishman. "You cannot fight the sword with the sword." And then he had added, regretfully, faintly: "He that lives by the sword shall die by the sword."

Finn had noticed this old Russian, who was familiarly and



affectionately known as Old Breschoff, who, leaning upon his wife's arm, had taken a chair upon the extreme right of the table, facing the chairman, his wife, who accompanied him everywhere, taking a chair on his left and a little behind him. During the proceedings, this Russian woman of furrowed lines and smooth black hair had watched tenderly over her husband, winner of the Nobel Prize and head of the International Peace Society.

Finn knew something about him, this Tolstoyan non-resister of no nation, whose weak mild blue eyes concealed a peculiar tenacity of ideal and purpose, and who had won the admiration of the crank as of the average man, the respect of both friend and opponent. It had been said of him that he was the only Twentieth Century European who had succeeded in carrying out both in spirit and letter the teachings of the Christ whom he professed to serve.

Finn brought back these wandering recollections to the Irishman, who was declaiming in dour, powerful sentences: ". . . all this is only talk. We want action. War against War!" He brought out the words in one of his triumphant periods.

"Talk, talk, only talk," mimicked Fitz, who feared neither god nor devil.

"No, not talk—action," retorted his big opponent. "The day the diplomats declare war—we declare the International Strike. Gutenmann here will give the word in Germany, Valon in France, Masta in Italy—and on the word every workman throws down his tools. No wheel turns in the munition factory. No wheel in the streets. No wheel on the iron ways. The labourer throws down his spade. . . ."

"And the gravedigger also, I suppose," said Fitz.

"Let the dead bury their dead," said the big man as he sat down.

It was then that the young aristocrat who had first entered with the dusky-haired girl stood up to say something that rivetted Finn's attention. He was speaking of the impossibility of the General Strike, because he, like thousands of others had felt unsure of their ground during the previous weeks when Europe had seemed to be on the edge of war over a Morocco incident.

"It is something," he said, "which has caused the blood of some of us to stir—to stir to something that I cannot



define—perhaps to the call of the blood itself; or perhaps to the Thing behind what we know as the call of the blood, whatever that Thing or Person may be. It is a phenomenon not easy to describe," he went on—"it is more of a feeling than a thing of consciousness. That thing is patriotism." And then he had added: "It may be a sort of primeval stirring—it may be barbarous and uncivilised—it may be the highest form of virtue—but it is there, even amongst us pacifists. It cannot be explained away, not even by Durgan. There are instincts that are deeper than anything else—deeper than death—and of these the strongest is the instinct of country that men call patriotism. Perhaps patriotism is the splendid spur by which the gods achieve their ends. I don't know. But nothing is so dominating, so powerful, as this patriotism."

"Internationalism," came a deep voice from the other end of the table, at the moment when Finn had been watching the heavy, wise eyes of Ellen Masters fixed upon the speaker with something that might have been a smile behind.

But Ellen Masters had risen. It was curious to see how complete was the hush that followed as she looked above the head of the chairman.

"Internationalism is still only a word. It is not even a habit," said the Universalist leader. "It is something from the outside that has never been translated into consciousness—that consciousness which is the object of evolution" (something moved Finn at the words). "It is something that has come down as a revelation to the workers and, like most revelations, is not believed. Perhaps it is, as the previous speaker has said, that patriotism is one of the spurs by which the gods achieve their ends—perhaps in our times the chief spur. Perhaps, like men, the gods throw away their tools when they have finished with them. Perhaps Internationalism and the Democracy of which it is the result is a tool in the making, to be used when the time comes. Who knows? Perhaps it is that the gods grow upon the things on which they feed—but it that be so, the spirit of Internationalism which is but the mushroom growth of half a hundred years will, in the face of war, break to-day before the spirit of Nationalism which is the growth of the ages."

She had paused to look about her, as though, for the first time, aware of her surroundings.

"If England declare war—if Germany declare it—I will go on the platform, like most of you, to fight it as long as I can. I will tell the workers not to fight—and I will wait for the German, the French, and the other democracies to reciprocate—for the tocsin of War against War, as another speaker has said . . . even though, as I say it, I believe I shall be as a voice crying in the wilderness. . . ."

"To prepare the way of the Lord. . . ." It was Old Breschoff.

". . . to try . . . and perhaps to fail," she had added as she resumed her seat.

It was a wretched little cobbler from the East End who had once said to Finn: "The soul of a crowd is not the soul of a man—it's another sort of soul. It grows with the thing upon which it feeds. The crowd hisn't a collection of hindividuals—hit's a Thing. . . ." Finn remembered how the man had stopped as though puzzled at his own words. . . . "Wot I mean," he had gone on, "is that there's something behind a crowd . . . " and then he had stopped again, nor could Finn get him to explain. Yet what that little cobbler had tried to say was exactly what Ellen Masters and the previous speaker had been putting into words. Paris Asthar had said it more than once. And then, again, it seemed nonsense.

John Bluett had been trying to follow Ellen Masters with a look of bewilderment upon his good-natured face that brought memories to Finn of the Bishop of Whitechapel. It was that look which it often seemed to Finn was a characteristic of the age in which he lived. All sorts of people had that look—people for whom the age of transition was flying too fast. They were breathless and bewildered.

Bluett now broke in to protest against the previous speaker's idea of democracy, which "to us practical politicians and men of affairs is something more than a—a—sort of rowdy animal without any idea of a vote . . . " which brought in Fitz with a sarcastic:

"You've got votes on the brain, Mr. Chairman."

John Bluett was righteously indignant. "I hope I have,"

he said, almost spluttering. "Is it not the vote that has placed England where she is. . . ."

"Where is that?"

"Where is what? Why of course—of course" (he hesitated a moment, then plunged) . . . "of course ahead of every other nation—the home of liberty and free speech—the home of the Bible—the home that all other nations look to as a 'ome from 'ome;" and then, completely forgetting himself: "everyone knows that the Union Jack. . . ." He remembered himself . . . "but of course this is an International gathering. . . ."

"In which, unfortunately, foreigners are present," inserted Fitz. The meeting laughed, but to Finn it had seemed as the chairman spoke that something was speaking through him, something irresistible. It was the feeling he had about the big Irishman as about the young aristocrat and Ellen Masters. In a sense, they were but channels for a message—but from whom?—for what? For one nauseating moment he had the feeling that all those about him were automata—that he himself was an automaton. Then he put it away.

But it was quite clear that in this meeting, as in those others he had so often attended, there were distinct currents. Men and women seemed to be sent into the world by different streams, to do their particular work in those streams, and although the streams sometimes blended momentarily, yet, as a whole, they remained separate. And then again it came to him that what was really happening in the world about him was a blending of some of those streams, a blending that men called, indifferently, Democracy, or Internationalism, or Religion, according to the facet upon which they looked. And the blending was difficult.

And now Breschoff was speaking again. Finn, lost in his thoughts, had a vague notion, as he ruminated, that several delegates had risen to support the Irishman—to urge the use of force to kill force—war to stop war. It was then that Old Breschoff had intervened.

"I have seen more revolutions than any man or woman here has winters," he said—"I have heard the rattle of the rifle blend with the rattle of death—and I, Old Breschoff, once known as the Grandfather of the Revolution, tell you that blood never yet staunches blood, hate killed hate, or force,

force. Love alone can destroy hate, and non-resistance annul force. Love is the universal solvent."

"But it cannot solve the problem of defence of country," interposed Vallon, for the first time, from behind his smoked glasses in that half-blind gentle way of his, only that in his voice, to those who knew him, there lay unaccustomed fierceness. "That is the real problem."

The Irishman flung in bitterly to ask whether he would let their masters tread them, defenceless, under the iron hoof of brute force to force them to the slaughter benches.

Old Breschoff had replied, calmly: "And you—what would you have? Would you have a holocaust in our streets? Would you have demon passions unchained which cannot again be leashed? Would you have those masses who are only now finding, however blindly, their way to freedom, now nosing for the light, thrust back by superior force into shameful forgetfulness? Would you have the sun of the rising democracy blotted out by the dark clouds of reaction as"—he pointed through the windows—"the blue sky outside is dulling under the thunderclouds that are rolling up?"

"But," and his voice took a stronger note, "I tell you that war to-day is impossible. The modern man is too nervous, too highly strung, too civilised, to kill his fellows in the *battue* of a European war. Most of our fellow beings could not kill a sheep—much less a man."

"Man-killing is the easier—I've tried both," said the Irishman.

"I tell you war is impossible—there is a new spirit in the world," replied the Russian. "We shall not again hear the thunder of the guns. . . ."

He broke off as a peal of thunder came rolling overhead, to be followed by a lightning flash which illumined the increasing darkness of the place.

"There you have your answer," said the big man dourly. "Where is your policy?"

"My policy is the oldest policy in the world," went on the old man in that gentle voice of his. The policy of "Love your enemies!"

As Finn sat listening, there came to him again old voices to murmur in his ears. It seemed to him, as Breschoff spoke, that new lights were being thrown on old places. Old prob-

lems were solving themselves. Perhaps love was the heart of religion. He had felt that so often—but his love had so much hate in it—something like that big Irishman felt. But, still, love.

His old grandmother had said the same as she died: "God is love," she had said, and just before: "Even death cannot kill love." Sometimes he thought that death and love like hate and love, were but two facets of some common fact—were, perhaps, the same thing.

But the Irishman had interpolated: "That is an ethic—not a policy. How will you apply it?"

"Refuse to kill. That is how we will apply it."

"And you will have democracy slaughtered for its refusal because of this policy of the coward. You will have our young men, weaponless, slaughtered like defenceless sheep. Would you have them crucified?"

The old Russian had looked long and sadly at his fierce opponent and then he had said in a voice so low that it was difficult to catch: "Yes, I would. The Christ that is coming to save the world will be a Christ in corduroy—not the Man with the Red Flag on a barricade. He will hang, he must hang, on his cross, crowned with the thorns of his beliefs. He will be hanged, and be mocked, and die—but his death will not be in vain. He will die for a world." And then he had collapsed in his seat, as though he had been fighting with something.

There had been a great silence as though something were grappling with each person there. It was as though some presence had been with them in the room and, having delivered its message, had passed out again.

Vallon had followed after a few moments with an appeal mainly directed to his comrade Gutenmann, of an exquisite courtesy of phrase and diction. It was as though that Presence were still felt. He had been saying that, in the event of a European war, his French comrades would refuse to vote the war credits in the Chamber,, and had added, significantly: "if our German comrades do the same."

It was then that the German had come for the first time into the discussion, heavily:

"If *ve* do not move in de Reichstag, and if France see de chance to get back Alsace-Lorraine?"



It was as though a new spirit had entered the place.

And then Vallon had blenched a little as he said: "That is another matter. . . . Alsace stands outside all else. Then . . . perhaps . . . then . . . then"—he drew himself up as he peered blindly through his shaded spectacles—. . . "then we shall fight—Social Democrat and Conservative, Republican and Monarchist, side by side, proud to die for France." He turned for the last time and looked, sadly, proudly, at Gutenmann, who sat unmoved, crouched over his papers.

It was John Bluett who tried to bring back the meeting to what he called "facts," by saying that instead of taking steps to prevent war they had been talking about country and killing. "Gentlemen—I mean Ladies and Gentlemen," he had said, "I ask you as a practical politician standing for a responsible and practical party—is this sanity? Where are your facts?"

It was then Gutenmann rose for the first time and made the speech which lived long in Finn's memory.

"You vant facts, Mr. Shairman," he had said in his heavy German guttural. "Here is von—de fact of de Sherman Empire. Dat and de British Empire are de two biggest facts in de world. And vot is dis fact?"

"It is de fact of a nation in arms—of sevendy millions of peoples—ready from a boot button to a big gun . . . ready for vot?—for killing. Behind dose sevendy millions stands von vill, von voice—de voice neither of Kaiser nor Junker—but de voice of Shermany—de voice of de Sherman discipline, de brazen voice, and de mailed fist—von voice dat svings de whole—de voice, de instinct, of country. A voice, if you vill, clanked into de Sherman mind from de cradle to de grave—de voice of Vaterland.

"And do you know vot Vaterland means?" he had continued. "It means iron obedience; automatic vill; killing vidout conscience; var widout mercy. It means," and he had paused a moment as he said it, "it means de vorship of gods. It means de Sherman Superman; de Sherman Michael; de Sherman *God*."

"But will the German proletariat fight?" asked the Irishman. "Will they fight? That is the question."

As he spoke, the sound of a military band, coming out of



the distance, which had petered through once or twice as the German had been speaking, now swelled in volume as it approached, the speaker pausing to listen with the others. It was playing "The British Grenadiers," which, as it passed the hall, burst into "Rule Britannia!" the crash of drum and brass being drowned by the rolling cheers of the crowd.

"Vill dey fight? Ask dose, outside, if *dey* vill. . . . Dey vill not ask themselves dat or any udder question when *der Tag*—de Day—comes. De Socialist, like de Conservative Junker, vill hear only de clang of de trumpet—de voice of de drill sergeant—de crash of de Krupp. Krupp vill call, and dey vill follow as de little children followed de Pied Piper. And de Piper who vill do de piping vill be Michael—de Sherman God. Dose, Mr. Shairman, are de facts." He sat down slowly in the silence. Behind him, Finn seemed to see a terrible figure in gleaming armour—the German Michael.

It was in the silence which followed that John Bluett, bewildered, had said: "Then there is nothing for us to do here. If those are the facts, God help the International!"

And it was Fitz who, for the first time solemn, had answered: "He won't. He's a national, not an International God—still the God of Battles."

And it was on those words that the meeting had broken up, with Finn, torn by new emotions, as by old emotions to which he had long been closed, going out from the building to take the step that was to be so decisive in his life: to write, not the "picturesque," but the facts—Gutenmann's facts—the facts of the God of Battles.

Once more the thin grey line dragged itself into the heart of the mists and into that fiery sun which was now the brazen throat of Moloch. Once more he saw the piteous, helpless faces, to be led as sheep to the slaughter. Led by what? By men or by gods?



PART III  
LOVE AND DEATH



## XXVII

### OUT OF THE GREEN WATERS

Of course, looked at from all ordinary human viewpoints, Finn's action was mad enough. But Finn *was* mad, with that splendid madness which has always come up to defy the calculations of the mighty. Someone has written of this sort of madness that "it is the graving tool of the Power Behind, flashing in the shadows, and with its own secret paths."

He knew what he was doing. He knew that his article upon the Peace Conference, about which Thrum had left special instructions that it was not to be sub-edited, and handed in just before the paper went to press, would be uncensored. The result was that "The Earth" the next morning appeared with the "facts," un-dressed and unashamed. They were Gutenmann's brutal facts, taken from the lips of Gutenmann and placed in the lips of the statesmen of Europe, irrespective of country—the statesmen who, as the writer said, had made them possible.

It was an indictment of Twentieth Century statesmanship and civilisation, of a clarity surprising, but, the unforgivable, it was also a knife placed at the throat of the policy of the very paper in which these "facts" appeared.

It was not at all that the writer was clear about what was called Internationalism any more than he was clear about the faith of the rising democracy. Indeed, the more he looked into the one and the other, the more unsure he felt.

This was partly due to Ireland, the nationalism of which had, in a way, left him immensely confused, it being, as he naturally supposed, the antithesis of Internationalism, and yet it was this very Nationalism which had drawn him so strongly. With this, however, he felt that appeal of the Democracy which also drew him.

The thing that moved him in the latter was something rather

of permeation—something of the call of those voiceless millions out there in the great world—those millions that had made themselves first felt to him that day on the Embankment. Theirs, if it were a faith, was a dumb faith, “worshipped in temples not made with hands.” But whether for good or ill, he stood for those dumb things. He felt he had to speak for those who could not speak for themselves.

The results of his article, for him, were annihilating. But he had expected annihilation. Yet, he had never felt so sure of himself, with an undercurrent of the exaltation that came to him, at moments unbidden, out of nothingness.

After Thrum’s hammer had descended, and when he had spent all his money and was very low down, with all doors turned against him and his writing, for the hammer of Thrum was heavy and his arm, like his memory, long, Lanthorn gave him a “lift” by sending him to Ireland to write a series upon the faith that was Ireland’s.

Ireland was not Fleet Street. In Ireland he was not ashamed of his shabby tweed suit. From Father Con, as from Kitty, he got his old welcome, but, to his great grief, Johnny the Saint was not there to come scuttering along the platform to take his bag and to bless him. “Johnny had departed this life,” as Kitty O’Halloran said, “in a great blaze of glory entirely and had had the beautifullest makings of a funeral you ever saw in your life.” All the town, it appeared, had turned out to do honour to the passing of Johnny’s ragged blessedness and now, as Father Con said, Dunhallow was in the way of placing a halo around his head “and sure small blame to them. For didn’t God love innocents and children?”

Black Rock, in the way that it had, got to know that “Masther Finn was in trouble,” and in its own way did everything it could to show him that he was beloved. A ragged sheepish giant with his elbows sticking out of the blue of his woollen shirt, would always be at the door with a crab, or a few seagulls’ eggs, or a red gurnard, “fresh caught from the deep sea for the Masther’s breakfast.”

Crux’s ruined towers stood down by the edge of the waters with the winds of heaven blowing through their jagged timbers. The patent chapel was being used by the villagers for all sorts of utilitarian purposes, including pigs—“poor sowls that



had a right to a roof as well as the next Christian," as the lady known as "ould Biddy the Rag" had put it to Finn in plaintive apologia. But, looking out, four square to eternity, stood the chapel of the old faith, unconquered and unconquerable.

It was the full flood of the Irish summer afternoon when Finn found his way to the House of Dreams. As he walked across the yard, he could see through the windows of the glass verandah Mrs. O'Hara, now a little feeble, but with the grey eyes and black brows unquenchable, telling her beads upon her knees in the little room beyond. She rose to her feet to give him her own bountiful blessing, holding both his hands in hers. It was her benediction, for she never ventured to kiss him or he, her. There was a sort of shyness between them.

As he was greeting the old lady, a shadow fell across the floor. He turned to find a tall, almost strange, young woman looking at him with that cold penetration of long ago. It was Deirdre Asthar.

In the four years that had gone since they had met, since that day when after the demonstration in the square she had accused him of selling his country to Crux for thirty pieces of silver, when, turning on her heel, she had finished: "I think Judas must have been an Irishman!"—Deirdre Asthar had changed much. It was not only the physical transformation from girlhood into the splendour of an awakening womanhood—it was the psychological change informing the other.

The young woman who stood before him this August evening was a young woman not only sure of herself—she had always been that—but a young woman, conscious. He caught it instantly—that new quality. It was the quality which had stolen into himself since that day of the Peace Conference to which Thrum had sent him—perhaps had always been with him. Adversity had hardened him into consciousness—had struck fire from the hidden depths. He wondered what it was that had brought consciousness to this girl.

There was something translucent in her gaze as it turned indifferently away from him—or was it indifference? It might as easily have been close concern. It was that quality of elusiveness which had so often baffled him in this girl of queer impulses and hidden meanings. It was something that permeated her whole being. It was there in the fair clean neck with the hair cut to its base; in the rather short, strong

nose, and in the eyes under their clean brows that looked out across the grey stones of the mossy courtyard. It was the same Deirdre—with a difference.

And it was the Deirdre that brought back that dull pang which he thought he had buried for ever.

It was in that moment he knew he could never forget. Deirdre Asthar was of the sort who are not forgotten.

Then it came to him. She had in her, as such women had, a quality that was eternal.

These things swept across his mind as wind shadows across the face of a mountain. And then, with a cold little bow, she had gone past him, leaving Mrs. O'Hara to look after her with that loving hopeless look of hers, which somehow fixed the pang in Finn's heart. Then she had turned to Finn and pressed his hand to lead him into the parlour. The eyes were wet with tears.

Mrs. O'Hara had another surprise for him. Paris Asthar and Stella Fay were staying at Black Rock for Asthar's health. It seemed that his legs *would* take him where he didn't want to go, and the people had begun to whisper about him.

He lay within, propped up on a sort of settee and swathed, despite the sun outside, in a magnificent blotched rug of llama wool. Finn, who had not seen him for two years, was shocked at his appearance. The whole face seemed to have fallen in upon itself, whipped as it was with a network of fine lines that criss-crossed themselves in tanglement inextricable. Patsey in one corner sat watching him, never removing his eyes from the man's face. Patsey himself had scarcely grown, and the head was now out of all proportion to the body, a heavy blossom upon a slender stalk.

But Asthar greeted Finn strongly enough, in a voice that now seemed like a bell coming from a great distance, offering him his left hand. "Can't be bothered to lift the other—a contrary devil—won't do what I tell him." He looked down on the rug as though he could see through it to the unruly member lying underneath. "But it's the hand nearest the heart—eh Finn?"

He asked it with that faint touch of the brogue which in his more extreme moments crept into his voice and looked affectionately at Finn, who, as of old, would have warmed to

him had it not been for the shock of his appearance which still clung.

Asthar's eyes searched his face as though he would ask him a question, but seemed to change his mind.

"Don't look so scared, Finn," he said, "I'm not dead yet. I am not going to die," he added more fiercely. And then:

"There is nothing inevitable in death. Death is but a way of thinking. If we can persuade ourselves we will not die, Death can never overtake us." And then after a pause.

. . . "Man is a spirit, Finn. We are the stuff of which the gods are made." The eyes blazed in the parchment of the skull. And then there came from the mouth a meaningless babble—the lower jaw had dropped.

"Creeping paralysis," Mrs. O'Hara had whispered.

And then Finn had caught the great dark eyes, the only things unchanged in that human wreckage, looking behind him, and he had turned to find Stella Fay standing there, regarding him silently. She stood there with something of a ghost about her, or, as he put it to himself, as one who might fade away even as he looked, like a wraith. She also had taken a new quality since he had seen her last, also some two years ago—a quality of winsomeness. She was no longer so desperate looking.

She had run in on him and to his astonishment had thrown both her long arms about his neck and had kissed him quickly, closely, but, as it seemed to him, not passionately but affectionately—not upon his lips but upon his hair and forehead, pulling him down to her before the great wondering eyes of Patsey. And then she had run out with that awkward—graceful limp and had gone before he could get his breath.

Asthar smiled but said nothing. He had the gift of bounteous silence.

But as Finn, bewildered, looked about him, he caught the outline of Deirdre Asthar passing quickly across the window, her head a little bent and her face averted.

She had come in, her arms full of roses, had flashed a breathless look at Finn, whose face was one crimson flush, and going quickly over to her half-brother, had thrown the blood-red blossoms upon the rug before him, leaving the dead white of his face with the blazing eyes above in stark relief.

She had leant over him to speak to him, had arranged his cushions behind him, and had gone out, with a little stooping seeking gesture of the head, passing Finn without glancing at him. But he had noticed that although she spoke to Paris tenderly enough, she seemed at moments not to be able to bear to look at him, and would turn her head away.

Then he was sure she had seen and of course had not understood that the kiss Stella Fay had given him might have been that of a sister, with something loving, intimate, added. But that could not be explained to her—and, anyhow, what did it matter? She was nothing to him—or, rather, he was nothing to her. She had passed beyond him, unattainable as a star.

All such things were so impossible of explanation—yet Finn knew the kiss Stella Fay had given him was different to those others. That first time when before the dinner at "The Cloisters" she had said to him: "Little boy, I'm going to spoil you;" and that other time down by the green waters when she had pressed her wet body to his and with her red lips had kissed him twice full on his own. And that last time—for he had never kissed her afterwards—that night in the valley under a moon of passion when their lips had sought each other to cling together in an ecstasy of living, that night when she had sought to keep out the sound of Deirdre's voice by her hot kisses upon lips and eyes.

But in this kiss, to-day, there was something of affection—of farewell. And it was in that kiss he knew, for the first time, that Stella Fay loved him.

He shivered a little there in the hot sunlight and looked at Patsey, who was now staring at him—not at Paris Asthar.

"Take Patsey out," said Asthar with a smile on his face that might have been the grin of a gargoyle. "He's always looking at me—aren't you, Patsey? I can't stand his eyes." He laughed, but there was anxiety in his laugh. Finn had never seen Paris Asthar anxious before.

"Do you know what I heard him tell Togo there, only last night, when he thought I had gone to bed?" (the little Japanese had come in like a gnome and having made his jerky little bow to Finn had busied himself about his master). "He said to him: 'You're only a poor yellow heathen and there's no harm tellin' you—but you won't have your masther

long—sure didn't I see death in his face and three scaldy crows on the roof-tree in yesterday's dawn.' And he's been telling Mrs. O'Hara something about Stella. I can't get it out of her, but she is so superstitious—and she's troubled.

"A most uncanny person to have about the place. He's always looking at Stella these latter days with those great round eyes of his, and they give me the creeps." He pretended to shudder, but the pretence had passed into the reality and the muscles of his lower jaw began to rattle like castanets, causing Togo to bring him some brandy, which he poured between them with difficulty, spilling some of it over the breast of his dressing gown of stuffed silk. Asthar tried to steady his mouth with his left hand, and altogether it was a pitiable exhibition.

But all the time Patsey stared at him, until at last Finn, fearing he would laugh or cry out or something, literally ran out of the place into the dark night. He found his way along the valley and down the winding path to the Cove lying with its golden sands lapped between the low-lying rocks covered with seaweed on one side and, on the other, the shadow of Carrickmore which towered up into the stars—the stars that, seawards, hung low and dewy over the blackened waters under the half-moon.

The sea, strewn with stardust, was heavy, with an uneasy stirring on its sullen gleaming surface. Sentient, it rose and fell in satiny pulsations like a vast pall. The great scimitar of moon hung low over the waters as though the thing that breathed below were dragging it downwards. The concavity of the night was soundless save for the plash of a heavy curl where it sank exhausted on the beach, which glimmered in the starshine like dull gold. A solitary seabird cried away in the heart of the blackness.

Finn's heart was very heavy—heavy as the leaden surge itself. He stretched his length on the hot sand and looked up into the darkness, lost himself in the velvety speckled dome above, and felt the secret attraction of the planet that seemed to lie so heavy on the tides and on him. As he lay there, himself now part of the smother of earth, sea, and sky, he felt again that desire to lose himself in the heart of the sea as he had once felt the desire in that tabernacle of long ago to lose himself upon the bosom of Infinity. But he did not



want to lose consciousness—but to find it—even in that moment he knew that.

The pall of waters was broken by a great wave that creamed itself palely out of the night to fling its thunderous length upon the beach—to be followed by the brooding silence.

It was then that it crept to him where he lay.

It came creeping to him over the sea with something elemental in it, a woman's voice out there in the velvet of the night. It was a kind of *ullagoane* arising and falling in the minor and then dying away in that place of enchantments.

Who could be singing out there in that blackness? The boats were all in. He felt a stirring of the skin.

He listened again, but could hear nothing—and then it seemed to him that he had imagined it all. The night seas had always held queer noises as they broke into the caves under Carrickmore.

Behind him he heard a soft scatter of sand in the stillness. He turned half on his elbow to see a figure coming towards him wrapped in a long fleecy cloak which, in that light, seemed to have been woven by golden spiders. And then, unheeding, the figure had almost stumbled in the shadows over the man lying at its feet.

He had turned to rear his long bulk under the stars which now seemed almost to be touching the earth. It seemed to him that he was looking at a ghost.

As he looked, the voice had once more crept out of the night. And the figure had turned its head to listen, dropping a corner of the fleecy wrap as it did so and leaving revealed to him the head and neck of Deirdre.

"What is it?" he asked stupidly, in that glamour forgetting her hardness and indifference.

"You should know." And the low voice with its contralto note was vibrant as, with her old gesture, she shook her face clear from its veil of hair. It astonished him. Deirdre Asthar had never shown feeling before. For the first time, she was incredibly concerning herself with him.

Something rose within him like a blinding flame—only the next moment to die away.

And then, still bewildered, he had asked: "Why?"

"You should know. You *do* know." He was again aston-



ished at her feeling. It left him stupid, seeking, like a man, blind, to find the door of his own prison.

"I do not." And he said it honestly enough.

"You have kissed the lips which are singing out there. You have kissed them within the last hour." And she had laughed—a little stinging laugh.

Then it burst upon him. The voice from the seas was Stella's. It was Stella Fay who was swimming and singing out there.

"I did not," he answered in simple directness.

"Then you are also a liar," said the girl with a calculated brutality. "I saw you kiss her."

"You did not," he said. "It is you who lie." But even as he spoke in his anger, he knew she thought it. And who would not have thought it?

And now he was enraged with her. It was the mood of that day when he had written his last article in "The Earth." A mood that could not be controlled. It was that Berserk madness which had always come upon him since a child when unjustly treated.

"You dare to say I lie. Who are you that dare to say it?" he had gone on in low, fierce tones, looking her in the eyes. "You have never been fair to me. You have always been unjust. You have always been . . ." he hesitated a moment, then pounced: "baffling. You—who are you that you should speak to me so?" It seemed the pent up anger of years that at last was breaking forth.

"Stop!" she said, and in her eye as it turned was that metallic flash he knew so well. "If you did not kiss Stella Fay an hour ago—she kissed you. And you have kissed her before. You know you have kissed her." And then, after pausing one breathless instant, she had flashed: "You know you kissed her that day down by the waters—kissed her twice full on the lips. I saw you. Deny that!"

He stood silent, amazed, not at the accusation but at the feeling behind. Hitherto, this queer girl had always treated him as of no account—treated him with contempt.

"You can't" she said triumphantly, flinging her hair back from her face as though to see more clearly. "You did kiss her." And now her wrap had fallen from her shoulders to the golden sands, unheeded, to show the beautiful neck with

the two round breasts underneath the silken stuff of her dress. "Nor can you deny that you tried to sell Black Rock to Crux, as you have already sold yourself and your country to Thrum. I have read your articles. Ireland has read them."

A cry came to them out from the sea. It had seemed to come from the heart of the waters—a great hollow cry it was. And then stillness. They had both heard it—but their passion had held them indifferent to everything around them.

"Now, you have your gratified ambition," she went on. "You have your rewards. You have had your thirty pieces of silver—or is it gold?" she added mockingly. "But the girl out there—" and she swept one long rounded arm out over the waters—"she bought you more cheaply. . . . She bought you with a kiss—soul and body." She had added the last word almost under her breath and had come close to him, breathing fiercely, her whole being quivering. It was as though anger and hatred had taken her out of herself.

And he, who, hearing her last accusation, so untrue—but only untrue because the girl who was speaking had saved him from himself—he who realised that this girl knew nothing of his article in "The Earth" and of his poverty—he flamed against her. He did not know whether he hated her or loved her. Afterwards it seemed to him that he had lifted his great arm to strike her down. It had been lifted there under the stars, the fist clenched, whilst she stood underneath its shadow, dauntless, the little red lips parted over the gleaming teeth, the eyes without fear.

It was in that white-hot moment of passion, pregnant with love and death, that moment when the burning eyes of the girl, falling a moment, searched the waters beyond him, that the low curl of a long roller, sheening in the starshine as it broke towards them in low thunder the length of the shore, drew them both—for him to see her staring at something behind him. He had turned to see the sheen of the dark surge under the starlight with the copper strands of a woman's hair caught up in the waters and the outline of a naked form. And then the great wave had broken past them to cast there at their feet under the shadow of Carrickmore the body of Stella Fay.

The uplifted arm had fallen—but about that other, who

had looked into his eyes and fallen forward to the arms that were waiting.

They stood there on the hot sands—stood there in each other's arms under the dewy stars with only the beating of their hearts and the splash of the sea in their ears.

## XXVIII

### THE WAKE

The August moon, heavy with labour, travailed low in the western sky. A great sea gannet lolloped heavily across the surface of the planet, whose golden shadows irradiated the sea with a light neither of earth nor heaven.

The sea scarcely breathed under its spangled pall. The expanse of waters was deserted save for a hooker that swung nakedly on the swell, its cordage crying out there in the half lights like a thing in pain. The little village straggled darkly in the shadows. The lightless windows of the cabins were socketless eyes that wept for what had been.

Only one spot beaconed out in that place of death—the house beyond the valley, which could be seen by the wayfarer gleaming softly in the darkness as though it were raised on a high altar beneath the dome of the night skies.

One room alone was suffused with light—the room where the flame of the waxen candles stirred, sluggish, in the heavy airs. In one corner, under the blue of an arching canopy spangled with golden stars, Stella Fay lay like a bride, her hair of burnished copper strewing the bed in great waves that flowed over the lace of the pillow and down to the floor. A bride of death, clad in blue silk and lace drawn closely over the childish bosoms that showed themselves faint in that ghostly light, Stella Fay lay there, and as Finn and Deirdre standing there alone hand in hand, thought, looking at them, not unkindly but searchingly, through the dark circles of the eyes.

On her bosom, just under the slim white throat, lay a cross of ebony, about which the slender hands entwined themselves. In that rosy waxen light, the face was not pale, but flushed faintly.

The eyes were not those of a dead woman. She lay there

as though the spirit were not far away, and as though, having done her work, she was secure and satisfied.

She had died in the bosom of Holy Church, for, as they had discovered from Father Con, Stella Fay had come to him one evening after vespers and, weary of earth, had flung herself upon the broad breast of the Church.

There came from the outside of the house a long hollow cry. Their hands gripped, in sudden fear—it was like the cry that had come to them that evening out there from the dark waters. It hung for a moment in the sluggish airs of night, wound about the house, and then came full as though it had been thrown into the room itself—circled a moment, passed, and died away into the heart of the pregnant stillness.

They heard it rise again, and with it another that lifted itself underneath, at last to blend—and so the others, until the whole house was filled with the *ullagoane* of the keeners—the old women who had known and loved the girl that lay there, listening.

And now words were forming themselves to stray through the rising volume of sound that echoed itself about the house.

“Oh! ochone! ochone! Sure it was she that had eyes like the heart of the grey waters—the red of her lips was like the hawthorn berries in the autumn days—her step was thistledown on the wind. . . .”

The voices of the old women came gustfully in the Irish.

Deirdre and Finn stood there staring at the girl on the bed—the girl who seemed to smile to them as though in secret. Had she risen and spoken to them they would not have been surprised. In the magic of the night all things were possible. It seemed to them a night when the two worlds had drawn very near and the spirits of God were abroad.

“Who was it that tuk little Paudeen out of the heart of the green waters?” wailed the voice of the leader—that voice which seemed to run through and sustain all the others.

And then the others in answer:

“Sure it was she that lies there in the arms of death this night.”

The single voice came again:

“Sure the look on her face was the look on the face of an angel of light. It was she that had the gracious presence and that the children loved. The perfume of her presence was

like the rose of summer and the smile on her face was like the dawn on Slievebloom.

"She came to us out of the great waters—and it was the great waters that tuk her.

"When she would be lukin' at you she would not be lukin' at all for the breath of this world was not in her—it was she that was an angel of God.

"Oh, sure 'twas she that was good to Black Rock and that made her nest in the hearts of the people.

"Oh Mary, mother of God, friend of virgins and of loving hearts—have mercy upon her and intercede for her. May her soul rest in glory!"

*"Oh Mary, mother of God, pray for her!"* came in wailing chorus.

"Oh mystical rose! Tower of ivory! Heart of Gold! Star of the Morning!" came the voice of the leader. And then the reply:

*"Pray for her!"*

"Oh, holy St. Joseph, chaste guardian of the Virgin! Guardian of Virgins! Terror of demons!"

*"Pray for her!"*

The voices came and went in the Litany of Death. Finn looking above the dead girl could almost see the Roman gods, in halos and coloured robes—that galaxy of saints and angels set golden in the tenuous blue of the starry firmament.

And the girl on the bed smiled to them, friendly, with that secret smile.

And out from a corner of the room where Mrs. O'Hara had stolen, there came her voice as she prayed and blessed herself: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, be with us now and in the hour of our death. Amen."

Finn, for the third time in his life, wanted to throw himself down there by the side of the girl on the bed and to pray for her and for all the world. It was the feeling that had come to him that day in the Tabernacle and afterwards in the Westminster Cathedral. But it was the same impulse which, without his realising it at the time, had been behind so many of the determinative acts of his life, as that day when he had gone from the Peace Conference to write the article which was to sever him from Thrum and from success—that article which in its way was a prayer.



In that moment, there was neither Protestant nor Catholic—Jew, atheist, nor Universalist—all were one. It was that feeling of oneness that came over him in his times of the greater emotions—the feeling that made all faiths the same—all faiths wonderful and all faiths indifferent.

And now he turned from those eyes of the dead to feel the eyes of the living. For Deirdre, still holding his hand, as a child holds its father's, was looking into his face, and then she had come close to him and sunk her head as though to hide it within his breast and had whispered: "Take me out, Finn dear. I cannot bear more."

They had gone out into the dusk of the August night and had wandered across the mossy cobbles and down the boreen now dark with its massy foliage. And so they had wandered into the valley and along by the stream where he had walked that night with the dead girl who lay up there. Not to be ashamed—but to think of that and of all.

The lush grass rose high about them and the night was heavy with thoughts unspoken. He could feel the girl under the lee of his shoulder clinging closely to him with both her slender hands, pressing his elbow tightly to her side. Not a sound came from the thicket beside them—they were there deserted save for the *ullagoane* that rose and fell in the airless night. Above them, gleaming softly in the darkness, the lighthouse of the House of Dreams stood sentinel.

All at once, the little hands had broken loose from him and the girl had come round to face him, barring his way, her arms hanging loosely at her sides.

"Love me, Finn," she said, her breath coming and going hot on his face. "Love me. You must love me—*now*." And then: "I am not dead, but living." There was fierceness in the voice. And then she had whispered as though she were unconscious of what she said:

"Love and Death are the same thing."

He looked at her wonderingly, and something stirred deep within him as something that is wakened from sleep.

"You must love me now—now."

She had drawn herself closer to place an arm about the neck so high above her—the other sinking at her side.

Above them the keen came and went on the fluttering night wind that had risen. It seemed to them as though the dead

girl up there were crying—crying for the things that had been, that might have been. But they left that thought unspoken.

The scent of the grasses came heavily to his nostrils. The girl was close to him—this girl once so cold, so unapproachable—and as his arms stole about her waist and he felt the coolness of her body in the hot night, she hung resistless.

And now both arms had closed about her as she hung there, to draw her into him. The little red lips were parted to show the gleam of the tiny teeth behind. The veil of hair had fallen over her face, over the hanging head as though to hide her shame, the shame of her hot love under the August night.

From above them came the sound of the *keen*—that swelled once more out of the darkness and then died away into the silence.

## XXIX

### IN THE SHADOW OF THE OLD CHAPEL

For four days and four nights they waked Stella Fay. She lay there in waxen beauty under the corpse-candles, smiling to those who entered. And there were many who entered, for all the country around loved the girl who had had the strange queer spirit in her that was the spirit of Black Rock.

And they took her down through the valley that led from the House of Dreams—took her down in the long black coffin with the silver handles, where she rested on the shoulders of the four giants of the sea like a queen on her bed. And so up to the old chapel that on this afternoon of setting sun seemed to smile bounteously to the daughter that had come to it in the long last, whilst the choir, which had come to meet her, sang "The Song of Death."

And there before the tapestried lighted altar she lay, trestled high above the people who loved her and who knelt about her to pray for the unquiet soul. She lay there, raised over them like a queen of heaven, with the tapers in the lofty candlesticks burning steadily in the incensed air, three on each side. And there, Father Con, a priest of God, helped by Father Hennessey, who took a new nobility from his office under the high lights, celebrated the Requiem High Mass—that mass of the dead hallowed by the centuries, with its cadences of haunting beauty; its prayers; and its silences.

"*Recordare Jesu pie . . . perdas illa die*" shivered through the old building, finding its echo in the hearts of all there. And then the figures of the choristers, each with a lighted taper in his hand, standing within the Sanctuary before the coffin as beings from another world to light the dead girl on her way; all to end in the triumph of the Consecration of the Host and the Church's blessing and assurance—final, absolute.

Finn and Deirdre, behind the others, could see her staring

upwards through the darkness of her coffin, listening to the Latin words and smiling to herself with that secret smile they had seen down there in the House of Dreams.

And behind, Paris Asthar, with his crutches, dragged his legs about the stone pavement—the dark eyes looking mournfully out from their sockets, with Togo, a yellow shadow, haunting him in the rear. For he had been fond of Stella Fay—had loved her as a good comrade. And with her passing, something, final, had seemed to break in him. He was crumbling, resistlessly, to ruin.

It was here that Finn, who had missed Deirdre, found her to his astonishment, praying, or trying to pray, in a remote corner of the chapel. "Oh, God! give me faith," he heard her pray as he stood behind. And then, the broken: "But I can't . . . my God does not live in temples."

And he had put his arm about the slender neck where the sun-freckles dappled themselves on the white skin.

And so they laid Stella Fay to rest. In the shadow of the old chapel, where the winds of ocean haunted the graves. But it was Deirdre who said:

"Finn, she is not dead. You cannot kill things like Stella Fay. She is living and listening." And then she had shuddered a little and had flung herself, impetuous, into Finn's arms. And then, almost in a whisper, as though it were forced out of her: "I hate her, Finn . . . I hate her . . . and fear her. May God forgive me!"

It was Deirdre's Asthar's first prayer since she was a little child.

It was one of his recurring astonishments. This girl who had held herself in frozen aloofness from him through the years was now almost pathetic in her surrender. To others, as reserved as ever, she seemed filled with the desire to sacrifice herself to her lover. She would be walking with him alone and would all at once wind her arms about him and drag down his head to kiss him passionately on the lips. She would forget her shyness and press her body against him as though she desired to absorb him. And Finn, touched inexpressibly by her surrender, forbore to take advantage of it—cherishing her as fine gold and wearing her as a lover should.

Paris Asthar accepted it all with his whimsical philosophy,

smiling at them as a very old man might smile at playing children. Only once he had said to his half-sister:

"Deirdre, you and I once played for a stake—the soul of a man—only that you did not know it—and you won. But you are the only being that has ever taken from me the thing that I desired—but love is stronger than desire—love is the strongest thing in the world. Only it cost the life of a girl, and perhaps it is going to cost the life of a man."

And that was the only time he spoke of the girl lying up there in the shadow of the chapel. Nor were Finn and Deirdre ever to know the secret of the cry from the sea—whether it was the waters that took Stella Fay or whether she died for the sake of love.

But from the day they laid Stella Fay up there, Paris Asthar seemed to fall headlong into dissolution. It was as though a living man were dissolving before them into the corruption of the grave. There was something awesome in his fight to live. The olive glow of the years that were gone had faded from the face, and it was now like shrivelled parchment, for each day the life-blood seemed to ebb, leaving the extremities to wither. The ears in particular had something apish in them, and the dark locks were now streaked with grey.

He battled against his invisible antagonist moment by moment, sinking lower each day with burning eyes, for all his vitality as it receded from his members seemed to pass into those eyes. But in his decay there was something statuesque.

And so Paris Asthar fought with death . . . and then, near the extremity of dissolution, prayed for death. But death would not come at will. Paris Asthar could not die. Had he not said he was immortal?

Until that evening of late September when Deirdre, forcing herself to the task, went in to busy herself about the couch where he lay—he would not go to bed—and found him propped up in his silken gown looking out through her, a strange fierce smile on the broken face, a smile of conviction triumphant:

"The Gods live!" he had whispered, not to her, but as though to himself.

And then:

"I am here," he said, looking out and a little up before him, smiling. The broken head had fallen forward. Paris Asthar—Immortal.

Five days afterwards they laid him up there by the side of Stella Fay, but she, as became a daughter of the church, in consecrated, he, in unconsecrated ground, beneath the shadow of the chapel that gathered them all in.



### XXX

#### "IN SICKNESS AND HEALTH . . ."

It was one night of early September, under a golden harvest moon that Deirdre had told Finn, shyly, that she had loved him from the moment when he had kissed Stella Fay down by the waters after she had taken Pauden from them. "I don't know, why, Finn, dear," she had said. "But that was the first time I realised it . . . I think—I think——" she had added a moment after, "I always loved you, but I would not let myself believe it. I did not know whether I loved or hated you. But it was that day by the green waters I first knew that, whether for good or ill, I loved you and for always."

Deirdre had written to her father, Old Asthar, to tell him of her engagement, when he very promptly and brutally told her "to lie on the bed which she had made and that he didn't care if he never saw her face again." Old Asthar never did things by halves. He was as thorough as his daughter.

But Deirdre in one of those queer moments of hers had made Finn promise solemnly that they should never again be separated; that wherever he went she should go—and he had promised—and then she had forgotten her father and the whole of a world which had never been hers. And indeed her father had neither forgotten nor forgiven the affair of the path, and the Dunhallow demonstration, and the part that Deirdre had played.

Finn had to return to London to write his articles after speaking with Lanthorn, who wanted to see him. For Deirdre and himself he took, to that young lady's astonished disgust at his care for the proprieties, rooms in separate houses in the same Hammersmith road, flinging her so to speak on to the friendly bosom of his landlady, a Mrs. Witherton, a dessicated little woman with a big heart, who, Cockney that she was, had not been out of Hammersmith for twenty years and had never

seen St. Paul's or the House of Commons. "Nor don't want to," she had said when she told this to Finn, pridefully. "The Old Mall Road's good enough for me."

Mrs. Witherton was the lady to whom he had gone, through a chance recommendation, upon his return, as he felt that, with Deirdre, Ash Villa and the Forestford road had reached for him their limits of toleration. Since what his mother had called "that disgusting exhibition" in "The Earth," which had led to his fall from grace, Ash Villa had been nearly intolerable.

Deirdre, as always dignified and self-possessed, had written an impersonal note to her father, saying that she would send for her things on a certain day, when Old Asthar, now thoroughly roused, had sent everything in two four-wheeled cabs—he would never use anything more modern. And so Deirdre was installed in the tiny Hammersmith room, her more intimate possessions of silver and tortoise shell, with lingerie fit for a princess, filling her landlady with an ecstasy but imperfectly suppressed. Her lute hung on the wall.

There was something that touched Finn in the way that Deirdre deliberately, so to speak, took her new life by the throat. She made out a list of her resources and calculated that she would not want any new clothes for many years. "She did not want to be a handicap," she said. But in her dress and person she was as dainty as ever.

Finally, after much searching, Finn found a box-like flat with a green door by the side of the river, for which he contracted to pay the landlord, a most uncalculating baker of the Plymouth Brethren persuasion, the sum of eight shillings and sixpence per week. They would have a Lilliputian kitchen, a box room into which one might or might not be able to get a hip bath, a tiny sitting room and a bedroom, to hold one.

The mathematics of householding staggered them. The problem seemed simple enough: how to furnish an eight and sixpenny flat upon nothing at all save good will, some forty pounds sterling which Deirdre, luckily, had standing to her private account, and a precarious free-lance journalism. Necessity developed for them all sorts of ingenious "contraptions," as the word went in Black Rock, for getting over the irreducible minimum.

An oak divan in the sitting room could be used at night by

Finn as a bed. The lighting problem was solved by a single burner with an incandescent mantle over the solitary table, which could be used for working at or eating off. Wardrobes were avoided by one shelf-wardrobe forgotten by a previous tenant, who had left in a hurry, and by a cunningly arranged hanging curtain on rings. Carpets were a luxury and could be dispensed with in the early days by staining the floors and using some mats—alleged Chinese.

It was not until all this had been settled that Deirdre remembered the question of marriage, as Finn one day discovered. *He* had been giving some anxious hours each day to the point.

Should it be in a church? Or should it be at a registrar's? Neither Deirdre nor he were members of any church, but if they were not married in a church they would be "living in sin," whatever that might mean, according to Mrs. Fontaine, who expounded her convictions without ambiguity. In an evil moment, Finn had told his mother that they were going "to marry each other," when she had gravely corrected: "You mean, *you* are going to marry her, Finn. A man must be head in his own house." Mrs. Fontaine, who was really feminism incarnate, was in theory a staunch upholder of the male principle.

Jemmy had twiddled his thumbs, as, when perplexed, was the way with him. Aunt Maria wilted. But Aunt Bella, now a malignant paralytic, clamped to her bed, cursed them in no uncertain voice.

"May God strike you down and your children!" she had said to Finn. "May He in His divine mercy, send down His curse upon you and your children's children." Having done her duty she had turned herself to the wall.

And so Finn had gone away heavy at heart. There was nothing to be done with such a woman.

Finally, Deirdre and Finn decided that the extreme limit of their concession to civilisation would be marriage at a registrar's, and very shame-faced, as though he were committing a crime, Finn went round to make enquiries in the Goldhawk road from a gentleman who gave him full verbal and fuller printed information.

It was really a matter which concerned nobody but their two selves, but upon Finn's mother threatening to die on the

spot if uninvited and, more shadowy, to haunt them afterwards, it was decided to invite Jemmy and his very much better half.

So, one fine morning at the end of September, at a quarter to twelve of the clock, Finn and Deirdre stood in Mrs. Wither-ton's hall, awaiting his progenitors. He was dressed in his only presentable lounge suit—an Irish stuff of greys and greens, and very well indeed he looked with a frame that seemed to fill the hall, and very beautiful and noble looked Deirdre, who had taken the whimsey to wear a cloak of Limerick lace with the shamrock of Ireland in Connemara marble dauntless upon her breast. She looked almost a child.

And here they were when Jemmy and his wife appeared at the gate; he, got up to the very limit of respectability and a trifle over, with his top-hat slightly over his ears, but fresh polished, a frock-coat that might have looked worse than it did, a pair of black cotton gloves, and trousers of which, with his last pair of cheap boots liberally slashed, the less said the better. And the inevitable umbrella.

He looked to Finn like a man who was near the end of the road, and his son's heart went out to him in affectionate compassion.

But Mrs. Fontaine put the day to shame. She might herself have been the bride, clothed in white from head to foot, with white kid button boots and a perfect breastwork of glassy jewellery.

Introduced to Deirdre, who for the first time in her life lost something of her possession, she gave her a perfunctory peck upon the forehead, for the young girl at the last moment had bent her head down as though she were going to butt her mother-in-law, who looked with a certain cold disapproval upon the flash of green at Deirdre's breast.

"You should have had orange blossoms, my dear," she said in a voice of oil and vinegar.

"But it is the symbol of your own Trinity, given to the Irish, to my people"—she said it proudly—"by St. Patrick. I am a better Christian than you, Mrs. Fontaine." It was an ominous beginning.

But to Jemmy she was cordial, kissing his poor shrunken face with her red young lips and smiling on him.

Finn's mother was adamant. "The Irish are pagans," she

said, "and I do not doubt that Patrick himself was a pagan person, too."

The cab was before the door, and so they were driven by easy stages and a knock-kneed horse, in Mrs. Fontaine's words, guided by "an antiquated horror of a cabman," who indeed had a gargantuan nose like a pantomime mask, to the registrar's in the Hammersmith Road, where they had to wait their turn on a long lean bench whilst a coster was being, as he said, "spliced" to the lady of his choice, who really had come out most alarmingly for the occasion, quite throwing Mrs. Fontaine into the shade.

The Fontaine sniff was much in evidence in what Finn's mother termed "these unholy precincts." Mrs. Fontaine looked and felt that it was all most irregular—that damning word which she used for all things with which she did not agree. And so, after a quite friendly old gentleman had said something over them both and had asked Finn to place an inconsequential ring upon the third finger of Deirdre's left hand, and after the aforesaid old gentleman had made a vague and professional effort to pretend that he was not doing this sort of thing all his life, had been doing it five minutes before with the coster gentleman, and would be doing it five minutes after, they all went out. But Finn noticed that Deirdre, proud little aristocrat, bowed only to the outstretched hand of the old gentleman when he offered his congratulations, which was a shame.

As they were leaving the building, Mrs. Fontaine whispered to Mr. Fontaine:

"I do hope, Jemmy, it's legal."

## XXXI

### JEMMY FONTAINE DIES IN HARNESS

On the evening of his wedding day, Finn got a telegram from his mother, for once surprised into the statement direct. It contained only three words: "Come at once."

Two hours later, in the cool of what for September had been a very hot day, Finn was knocking at the door of Ash Villa, scenting the blooms of the Maréchal Niel over his head, still in full glory and murmurous with the laden bees of evening. Ever after, the scent of roses blended in his memory with the scent of death.

His mother, bewildered and a trifle blown as though she had been running, all her self-possession gone, met him in the hall to point in silent confusion to the door of the little drawing-room where that June morning of eleven years before Finn had first asked his question: "Who was God? *Was* he?" Once again through the lowered blinds, he caught the scent of the roses and there came to him the soft murmur of the blooms laden with their clambering bees, the velvety backs, red and black and yellow, standing softly against the ivory of the flowers.

The murmur had mingled with another more sterterous, insistent—the murmur that came from the figure lying on its back under the window upon the mattress stretched upon the floor.

Jemmy Fontaine was near the end of the road.

Finn saw the poor broken mouth where it opened itself in the frame of the scanty greying beard eager to suck in the air that was now so precious, as through a bellows, but a bellows that was broken. He saw the shrunken skull and the shining yellow of the scalp and the filming of the eyes that never again would look upon him in bewilderment—caught the chest that laboured beneath the frock-coat and cheap black



tie of the wedding morning, awry and loosened, in which Jemmy had been carried in from the hot street where he had fallen with his encyclopædia—that terrible encyclopædia which was to restore the fortunes of the Fontaines, now irretrievably lost in the Happy Homes of England.

Ginger had discovered this last in some mysterious way of her own, for as Finn passed up to his bed he could hear her in the little closet where she slept with the tank and an abbreviated wooden box which she called a trunk, and where she was at that moment on her knees praying: "Gawd blarst Buldger! Gawd blarst Buldger!" repeated prayerfully again and again. A light came from under the door of the room of Ström, the lodger, the tap of his mallet like the tap of a hammer on a coffin.

All through the night Jemmy Fontaine battled with his invisible enemy, the enemy who had so often followed him in the heat of the long summer days, waiting to drag him down, to whom the encyclopædia had given his chance, at last. Through the hours of the September night, through the little hours when his enemy waxed stronger, into the heat of the new day—the broken bellows did its work, now crackling a little through the nozzle of the broken mouth where it fell a little on one side. And through the whole of the long day there was a steady thronging to see him die. Jemmy Fontaine was assuming a new importance.

Amongst the first was Uncle Bobs, who blew in immediately after breakfast, having, as he pridefully declared, "padded the hoof" from London. Uncle Bobs steadily ignored Death. For him, dissolution had no existence. His mortality was of an immortal texture.

"Nature, Sir, Nature!" he declared to all and sundry as he went from room to room, ignoring the fact that all those to whom he spoke, save Finn, were of the female sex. "Nature, Sir, Nature! If he had only lived on onions and water and slept under the air of heaven," said Bobs, now sacrificing to his hygienic gods, "we should have him with us now."

They did have him with them, however, for Jemmy was not dead yet. He could not die. But the bellows was giving out—a wheeze, intermittent, was adding itself to the crackle.

Aunt Judy haunted the dark corners, laying her nose over chair edges and looking with a certain inflamed curiosity upon

Jemmy as though he might solve the great secret. Sometimes she would stand up to get a better view, her head rolling from side to side and sometimes a-tremble. But towards the close of the day it was quite obvious that Aunt Judy regarded Jemmy as finished in every sense. She was now hopelessly non-believing and had given up the Spirit's Elect without, for the first time in her life, finding another experiment.

Every now and then Uncle Bobs would come in, vastly important and, despite the solemnity of the occasion, enjoying himself hugely, to urge his final remedy for all ills—bleeding. It was, it seemed, now too late for onions.

"Bleed him, Sir, bleed him!" he said in the voice of a genial butcher. "Cleanse the pores and vessels from the accretions of uric acid, Sir. Meat, Sir, meat, has been his poison."

And through the house Ginger flitted, a red-haired avenger, showing even for her, an unusual amount of red flannel in her distress and muttering her eternal: "Gawd blarst Buldger!"

Aunt Bella, accompanied by Aunt Maria, her eye squinting horribly, lifted herself for the first time in many months from her bed to come in like an insane raven, the Choctaw feathers, black and menacing, sticking out from her turban, to stand over her unconscious brother-in-law, now fast passing beyond the reach of the terrible denunciations, disguised as prayers, which she hurled upon his unconscious head.

Aunt Bella at least was determined that there should be no question of Jemmy's eternal destination and so she cursed him by bell, book and candle, the venomous mouth slightly slaving as she described with an anatomical minuteness which reminded Finn of "The Tortures of the Saints" he had once read at Dunhallow, the fate that awaited him.

For the first time and under this terrible stream, her sister Fanny wilted. This sudden striking down of Jemmy appeared quite to have destroyed that cool-headedness that had enabled Mrs. Fontaine through life to triumph over her adversaries.

With a minuteness that was intolerable, Aunt Bella, giving rein to her imagination, painted Eternity for her unconscious hearer. She revelled in its unceasingness. "If every grain of sand were a thousand years . . ." and Finn, listening, waited for the thing that was coming as though he had heard it all before—as indeed he had

And so, a trifle palsied and still spitting and slavering Aunt Bella having done her duty for the last time went from the room back to that bed to which she was now to be clamped for the rest of her life. She had done her work.

Mr. Titterling, unmonocled but spruce as ever except for his collar, which looked distinctly soiled, came in dust coat and white bowler, a chalk-faced convert. For Trevor Titterling had been converted to the Spirit's Elect some weeks before, and now was revelling, with difficulty, in a luxurious sense of security. It was obviously a call *de convenance*, as he sat there, his tail, metaphorically speaking, between his legs, his hair now thinning coming up into its horn points, and the rascally pitying humour in the pale eyes. He did his best, poor fellow, and, as Finn saw, was genuine enough in his own way, and he showed as little of his white gleaming teeth as possible, but it was not easy.

"Feel quite lost without my glass," he said in sorrowful aside to Finn. "The wife and elder Tompkins think it immoral. Crushing hard work, this conversion business, Finn. Fairly makes you sweat. Feel like a winner of the Grand National before the last fence—don't know if I can stand up . . . ."

"You see, I've fallen down so often," he added ruefully.

Father Lestrangle, a figure of gloom, passed through the house like a shadow. He was still cordial to Finn, but it was clear that he had given him up—as far as giving up was possible to such a man. And Finn, the old memories, coming back, felt old regrets and the old friendliness. But the glamour was gone. For now there was Deirdre.

Finn, sitting there in the small hours, found himself listening for something. And then he found he was listening to silence. The bellows had finished. The grey eyes were staring upwards, unseeing. The black tie and frock-coat had ceased to move.

Jemmy Fontaine had died in harness.

. . . . .

They laid him up there deep in the yellow clay under the black leaf mould, beneath a great oak, in the little churchyard on the edge of the forest, in the only land that Jemmy had ever owned, and without a tombstone. Only Finn and Deirdre followed the coffin and heard the "Ashes to ashes

. . .” and then the yellow clay playing its tattoo upon the black lid.

When they got back Mrs. Fontaine said to them:

“I hope you have not laid him amongst the paupers.”

Mr. Fontaine was always genteel.

## XXXII

MELLERAY

Instead of having their noses placed straight away against the whetstone of life in the eight and sixpenny bandbox by the side of the Thames, after the old gentleman had said something over them in the Hammersmith Road, Finn Fontaine and Deirdre Asthar were able, through the unexpected munificence of Lanthorn in connection with Finn's Irish articles appearing in his review, to fulfil the wish of their hearts. Their heart's desire was that they might spend their first days together in what Paris Asthar used to call "the fastness of the White Gods," that ghostly pile of buildings up there in the purple heather-covered mountains, given over to the wild plover and the glory of God.

They drove up towards the mountains on the jaunting car which, as the driver said, only hung together by half a spring and the blessing of heaven. Up and up, leaving the little village straggling down there by the side of the deep shining Blackwater, flecked with the foam bubbles of morning. Up and up, past the solitary wayside cabin where the bare-footed ragged children came out to smile in friendly shyness at Deirdre. Up, into the blue air of the morning of early autumn scented with the tang of the peat, until the habitations of men were left behind and, as Mick the driver said, they were "alone with God. And sure," said he, "isn't that a terrible thing entirely?"

So they came to the gates of naked iron that barred the way to the granite Paradise—behind which, like a grey mushroom, nestled the tiny stone lodge, from which ran a cowed shadowy figure with knotted rope girdle, from which, like a second St. Peter, a bunch of keys dangled. The great gates swung silently apart and they found themselves between the high narrow walls of the grey stone of which the place was

built, a veritable rock of God. Behind, the cells of those monks, who, that they might the better make the sacrifice of immolation with the Ineffable, had vowed themselves to eternal silence.

Deirdre, her eyes shining in that high thin air, her red lips parted, bloomed there between the high walls like the moss roses which nestled in the shadows at their feet, the blooms standing velvety against the stone.

They drove out of the narrowness of the way that wound into the heart of holiness to find themselves in the great square of the courtyard before a low grated postern, to be conscious of a face that searched them from the shadow, then the shutting of it out, and then the silent opening of the door.

Here in the guest-house they found the young monk with the rosy complexion and the brown kindling eyes who brought their first separation on earth. In vain that Deirdre, pagan that she was, bit her lip and looked in mute rebellion upon the rosy-faced janitor. But it seemed that here in Paradise the male sheep had to be shepherded from the female goats.

The ladies had an enclosure to themselves, so that the more vulnerable sides of masculinity might be segregated from the assaults of the flesh and the female devil. The White Gods, for all that Beautiful Lady, crowned and throned amongst them, were male. Woman was the unclean being.

There, amongst a lot of holy women, who told their beads and their stories with equal assiduity, Deirdre, young and beautiful, a dove amongst hens, found herself. Young mountainy women told her of sins they had never committed, and old women from the plains and bogs, of dead sins they would like to commit, but couldn't. And here, herded together in this corral of the faith, they drenched themselves with tea, that "spiritual drink" of Miss Kitty.

As for Finn, he found himself at one corner of a long table surrounded by rosy-cheeked, snub-nosed pig buyers, long-faced, cautious-eyed farmers, and young gentlemen from the cities, with inclination to pimples, all fast returning under the ministrations of the monks to a state of grace. There also were those great dome-headed theologians of Ireland, in whom Finn recognised the breed of Father Con, and amongst them, looking thoroughly ashamed of himself, a very rare theological goat, still clothed in the black coat of righteousness, sent for his



sins up here into the cleansing air of the mountains—a goat who sat furtively alone and watched out at the circumambient state of grace from which he had fallen through putting too little water in his whiskey. Whilst from behind came the voice of a young and ghostly visitant, habited in white, who, unnoticed, had stolen in to read for their spiritual edification an account of the lives, and especially of the deaths, of the saints, describing to an intensive accompaniment of knife and fork, which seemed to gather zest from the recital, an anatomically minute analysis of their sufferings.

The air of the mountains—the consciousness of grace—all led to inordinate consumption of the juicy mutton, succulent beef and sour milk, which were the nectar and ambrosia of Melleray—the food of the gods.

And then, afterwards, the sudden hush, and the low even voice of the monk who had entered, the other gliding out when his work was done:

*“Confiteantur tibi, Domine, omnia opera tua.”* With the murmured reply from those around:

*“Et sancti tui benedicant tibi.”*

Again came the voice of the monk:

*“Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritu sancto.”*

And then the chorussed, indomitable:

*“Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in sæcula sæculorum. Amen.”*

“As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.”

There came to Finn the grey ruin of a chapel, standing on a high shelf of cliff, looking out over broad seas.

Here, in Melleray, the spiritual and the material were close. The two worlds were not separated by the barrier of the invisible. The White Gods of Paris Asthar up there on the slopes of the mountains were very aloof and very familiar—tenderly indulgent to the frailties of poor mortality. Like Father Le-strange, inflexible in dogma, they were flexible in conduct. A permanent state of grace, save for the lambs of the elect, white-fleeced in habit and cowl, who even then had to mortify the flesh by flagellation and penance, shut themselves in behind stone walls, and, generally, isolate themselves from the wooing of the earthy world outside—was impossible. The love of whiskey; the love of those unclean creatures, women; the love

of forbidden fruits: these things were inherent in Adamic humanity, spiritual lapses were in a sense the normal, as were their concomitants—spiritual bursts into Melleray—so consecrated, refreshed, for further falls.

And so, the women still shut up within their enclosure, the male sheep, with some male goats among them, were taken the rounds for their moral edification. They were shown those bare cubicles of chastity in which the monks spent but a handful of hours out of the twenty-four, giving the rest to the glory and praise of the Godhead in the Mass. And it was from one such cubicle that Finn, left for a moment behind, saw a sorrowful figure steal—the high pale brow glistening with the sweat of the spirit under the flagellations of that flesh which here was not its temple but its mortal enemy. And all this time, Deirdre, for the first time in her life protestant as her heretic father, strained at the invisible bars to come to life and love, listening unheeding to the women about her, to the holy talk which flowed along its time-worn grooves, ceaseless and unchecked.

Faith and morals tended to rest up here on the slopes of the purple hills. Complin, and then to bed in that tiny room where in the holy books on the narrow table Finn met once more the tortures of the saints. Reading by the light of the thin solitary candle, his eye lifted now and again to the plain crucifix, with, underneath: "Oh, sweet Jesus, may'st thou be ever crucified in my heart by nails of love, who for love of me wast crucified with nails of iron on the hard wood of the cross . . . ." And over the high mantelpiece the plain black and white of the printed text, with the word "Eternity" brooding over all, and below that frantic ticking of the square wooden clock with its hurrying pendulum: Tick-tick—tick-tick, that seemed to say Et-er-ni-ty—Et-er-ni-ty—then a success of ticks: Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick, each moment treading upon the heels of the other, tremulous, insistent, menacing.

Finn's eyes, searching the text, read: "If each grain of sand were a million years . . . that would not be eternity . . . ." Where was it he had read it before, or heard it?

Then he remembered. It was the Elder's prayer—that day of long ago at Mrs. Titterling's. It was those great White Gods, set against the starry firmament of blue and gold, meet-

ing in the circle of faith that darker, gloomier god of the Spirit's Elect and those gods of blood and fire of Aunt Bella. Faith was one thing after all, under all guises. It took different forms, but it was the same thing.

Up there in the silence, it broke on Finn. Perhaps all faiths had the same kernel. Perhaps all these faiths were but means to find out God—perhaps all roads led to God. Perhaps the God of his father and grandmother and Mrs. Titterling as of Father Lestrangle and Billy Pickles was the same God. Perhaps no man by searching could find out God, but perhaps no man could escape Him.

And thinking this, he fell asleep to the hurried ticking of that clock: Et-er-ni-ty—Et-er-ni-ty—Et-er-ni-ty—Et-er-ni-ty.

Finn awoke in the grey of the dawn where the shadows still clung like cobwebs outside the window panes—awoke in that silence which seemed to have grown there like a concretion through the years, from that day when these poor monks, fleeing from a hostile land, had come up there to the bleak hill-sides to find to their hands only the purple heather and the grey boulders—those willing hearts animated by that love which had conjured out of nothingness the battlements of the faith.

He found himself listening to the breathless beat of the clock which warned the sinner of the shortness of time and horror unending.

A hollow cough came from beneath his window.

He rose, to see in the tiny enclosed yard below, with the grey cobblestones that brought back the House of Dreams, a lonely cowed figure. It was that of an old bearded man, his hands laid in the hanging sleeves of his brown habit, the cowed face, dimly realised, searching up there over the high grey walls to where a single shaft of light struck rosy upon a distant mountain peak.

The old grey face searched for it as a blinded man turns towards the light: the old grey lips moved in prayer: the fingers stole down for the beads that hung from the corded waist. Something stirred in Finn.

It was outside, wandering in the golden dawn within that iron compound of the faith that Finn, pondering that face of the old man as he searched towards the rosy spurs of Knock-

meal down, saw across the space of the green walled courtyard a face looking at him through the grating of the wooden gate. It was the face of Eve shut out from Paradise—the tousled hair and green eyes of Deirdre, who beat herself like a bird at the grating. And then the face had disappeared and had shown itself over the wall at the side, to be followed by the figure that wriggled over—and so she came running to him in the green and bronze of the autumn morning, running across those precincts sacred to the male, and had thrown herself into his arms before the line of monks then filing in lonely file to their chapel, and had kissed him upon the lips.

The cowed heads bowed themselves as though blinded by an unaccustomed light, and then had passed.

A white-robed figure came stealing to them across the grey stones, a man of waxen face and great dark eyes. Only that the eyes softened a little as they rested upon the face of the young girl—softened with the pity of knowledge for the ignorance of young life. A flush had come into the hollow cheeks as they fell upon the fair young breast that showed itself beneath the V of the green dress, and so the cowed head had turned to Finn with a grave: “No woman has ever before set her foot within this enclosure. It is a very great sin. And your wife will please close her dress for Christ’s sake.”

And so fairness had to be covered in so that it might not shame the glory of the white gods—and so Deirdre, her little green dressed pinned closely up, was led away through the barred portals, which were locked upon her—but not before she had turned and sent a lightning message to her man who stood there looking after her.

But Finn felt that these gods were all-powerful—implacable. Had they not shut out love?

It was with him as the brown-eyed monk of the first day unlocked the shuttered window to show them those lonely mounds with their crosses of black timber to mark where the children of God, waiting the signal for judgment, crouched underneath in the way of their Order. It was with him as he saw the solitary figure of a young monk, the grave in which he stood still shallow in the springtime of life, lifting his daily sod from the hollow that was one day to receive him. With him even when he remembered how once Stella Fay, that girl lying now so cold up there under the shadow of the old chapel,

had broken the law against love that day when, in this place of dying men, she had sprung into the open grave by the side of a young monk and had kissed him, full upon his lips.

But the white gods had shut out love.

It was with him in the glory of the mass of the early morning where the sun shone rosy upon the loftiness of the bare altar, served by the high, tonsured priests, where the sacrifice to Omnipotence made its circle of the hours. With him as he gazed upon the faces of the monks, those faces of parchment or ivory or wax, segregated from sin and suffering up there in the heart of the mountains—those faces before which the span of life, its nights and mornings merging, passed as one long day. It was with him as he looked upon the face of one old man, now almost at his hundredth milestone, the white-bearded face rosy as a child's with the rapture of the Mass, as he repeated: "*Et expecto resurrectionem, mortuorum, et vitam venturi sæculi. Amen.*" Waiting in the sure and certain hope to meet his God, his eyes aglow with the light of portals not of earth—a soul who had glimpsed the golden floor through the gates ajar, the light shining upon him from within.

But the gods were implacable—they had shut out love.

It was with him at the midnight mass, when the hooded figures stole into the chapel in the tapered darkness, shadows materialising from shadow. With him in that song of all the seamen of the world: the gentle "Ave Maris Stella," the greeting to the star of evening—the gentle friend of poor sailormen—the Queen of Heaven and the Mother of God. It was with him in that mystic carillon, herald of that Elevation when bread and wine became flesh and blood, as in the tremendous murmured: "*Credo in unum—Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, Factorem cæli et terræ, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.*" "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible."

It was with them in the soft glow of the tapers burned to those gods—with him there under the incensed lights.

And it was with him that last evening of late autumn when he and Deirdre, going outside the walls of the monastery to make love out there on the hillside, had seen that solitary cowed monk, mattock in hand, the skirt looped over naked sandalled feet, returning from his day of toil, the man who

brought back to him his father. He, too, was reaching the end of the road

For above and beyond all were the gods; the gods implacable; who gathered them all in.

But they had turned and kissed there in the autumn gloaming. Kissed with passion. Love and life amidst death.

Even the White Gods could not shut out love.



## XXXIII

### THE FIGHT TO LIVE

Finn and Deirdre went back to London to begin the struggle for existence in the little flat with the green door by the side of the Thames. Of the means to live, they had under fifty pounds and would have had less had it not been for the generosity of the monks up there in the mountains who would not take anything from them. "The fight to live is hard enough," that monk with the dark eyes and waxen face, who had made Deirdre close her dress for the glory of God, had said.

Each week saw a hole in their fifty pounds. The mathematics of free-lancing in Fleet Street were those of subtraction—seldom of addition. His difference with Thrum trailed him everywhere. It was not that he had quarrelled with Thrum that hurt him, but the rumour spread through Fleet Street that he had not been "loyal," was "untrustworthy." Although he managed to pick up the scraps of journalism, writing little articles here and there upon anything and everything, the big things always seemed to elude him.

That was the thing that ate into him. He knew he could do the things that brought the greater rewards—some of them at least not unworthy in themselves, things that he wanted to do, the things that mattered, and here he was condemned to delve in the scrapheaps of journalism. He suffered many indignities, some of them imagined; had been turned out of an office by a blackguardly pirate editor, and had been received by the luminaries of Fleet Street with much genuine kindness although many regrets. What was always surprising him about Fleet street was its kindly brutality.

He changed his name again and yet again. But his manuscripts went out and came back—saving those infrequent flippancies which were helping them to live. For the half guineas mounted up in bulk. If he used his name it spoiled his chances. If he did not, he instantly became one of the great unknown.

In the little home with the green door a new Deirdre showed

herself. The old Deirdre of wayward indulgence had long since vanished. She was Finn's guide and comforter and friend. The delicately kept hands now had hard finger ends and broken quicks. But the face and body were as fresh as that day when he first had seen her at the office of "The Earth."

In the beginning they had indulged in a char-lady—a Mrs. Coffin, who sometimes turned up and sometimes didn't, as wild fancy moved her. She was a voluminous voluble person—a slave to hiccoughs, and her ideas of cleanliness were scanty.

She would drop in casually about midday, tapping her silken bosom—she always wore silks of variegated colours—and would recite between hiccoughs a short story which rapidly developed into a romance about "herself and another lady." Mrs. Coffin invariably referred to herself as "a lady," and, as Deirdre discovered from hearing a passage at arms between her and the cabdriver's wife downstairs, upon a question of dustbin precedence, had her Achillean heel in the epithet "woman." This was the affront unpardonable.

This lady disarranged the furniture once a week at a remuneration of one shilling and threepence, the threepence being in lieu of that nourishing stout so essential to a woman in her condition. She was always referring to her "condition."

But as the shillings waned in the postoffice savings book, Mrs. Coffin had to be shelved, and so Deirdre did the work herself and, after initial knocked fingers and some barren experiments in patent house-saving appliances, did the work very much better than her predecessor. Finn washed the floors with an arrangement which Deirdre, following Black Rock nomenclature, called "the contraption." It was a dishclout tied upon a worn sweeping-brush which made housemaid's knee a superfluity.

The food question was for them slightly more involved than the provisioning of the armies of Cæsar. Finn knew nothing at all about commissariat and Deirdre just as much. As Deirdre said, "they saw them coming."

Butchers, otherwise normal kindly hearted slaughterers, seemed to reserve for them the most leathery portions of their beef and mutton, until they fell upon the greasy bosom of Mr. Belcher in the High Road, who, one day, after selling them an entirely uneatable piece of brisket, had suddenly changed

his mind from frantic recommendation to subtle condemnation, taking back the yellow monstrosity from Finn's net bag and substituting for it a piece of meat of a juiciness till then unknown in the flat with the green door. The Belcher wife, who always sat like a gigantic hen behind, in the pay-box, taking pity on them, had signalled him.

From that moment the meat problem was solved. Mrs. Belcher would extract herself from the invisible eggs upon which she always seemed to be sitting and come out for the purpose of adjuring "John"—that was Mr. Belcher—to see that they got the choicest portions. So it was that delectable pig's frys (Mr. Belcher had also a Pork Establishment at the side), tongues that tasted like marrow and pieces of corned beef that with carrots and potatoes melted in the mouth, found their way into the little bag which Finn carried each Saturday morning up to the High Road—all at prices which they did not discover until long afterwards were in or about the cost of production.

There was a certain etiquette about these things. Mr. Belcher, displaying a delicacy hitherto unsuspected in the brisket days, would show Finn a tongue marked 4s. 6d., bend down, find an imaginary coarseness of grain in the libelled animal which had been its possessor, whip off the brass label, and using injurious language to Bill, the butcher's boy, for putting the wrong label upon the meat, that young gentleman at this juncture usually wearing an air of injured innocence, although obviously in the plot, would gravely substitute one at a shilling less, take it out again, and cram the lot into the net bag.

Vegetables were much easier. But that was owing to a Spanish looking man in a back street with two greasy dark-eyed daughters, who, chattering, sat at the receipt of custom.

There seemed in fact to be a general conspiracy to protect these two innocents, who, in unconscious ingratitude, rather fancied themselves, imagining it was growing experience which enabled them to get such excellent value for their money.

Mr. Majolica—that was the greengrocer—his dark eyes gleaming over his white spade beard, would himself dive amongst the cauliflowers and cabbages for the firmest, whitest and greenest. He it was who warned them of the red potatoes and guided them to the balls of flour.

Groceries were more difficult.

At the beginning, Finn, alone in the early mornings, would take the net bag and go up to Mr. Hilltop's because it was convenient and because Mr. Hilltop, who was a member of the Strict Baptists, was such a nice man. It was only when many months afterwards he discovered that the Danish bacon for which Mr. Hilltop in the fulness of his heart charged one shilling and threepence, could be purchased in the Multiple Stores in the High Road for twopence per pound less and standard jams for one penny less than at Mr. Hilltop's, that Finn, to whom the pennies were now beginning to matter, left Mr. Hilltop to that gentleman's unaccountably un-Christian astonishment, and went to the stores.

Domestic finance was fast taking upon itself the nature of a fine art. In the beginning, before Deirdre's new clothes wore out, such things for them had no existence. It was only on that fatal day when Deirdre, lifting up her foot, showed Finn the broken upper and that other day of darkness when her best dress refused any longer to permit itself to be mended under the arms, that it broke upon them that clothes did not grow like skins. And, not so long after, there was that darkest day of all when they drew their last four shillings from the savings bank.

There was nobody to help them. Old Asthar, now a sullen old vulture, haunting the darkness of his clubs, was silent as the grave into which he was fast falling. Finn's father had died with just enough to bury him after the furniture had been auctioned off, and Finn's mother, still bewildered, had gone into a dreadfully respectable Home for Decayed Gentlewomen, where she was fast regaining that self-possession which had been her support in life. Finn prowled Fleet Street, sometimes wildly fluttered by transient cheque—sometimes as deeply depressed.

But through it all Deirdre comforted him, developing a philosophy of faith which supported Finn, the impatient, even in his darkest moments.

And all the time, Finn worked upon the book, long since discarded—that book upon Ireland and its spiritual significance for the coming Europe—the book he had begun that day when Paudeen had been nearly drowned.

It was in the opening chapters of Finn's and Deirdre's for-

tunes that what was known as the Moroccan Incident took place. It was about an intractable tract of earth, the position of which nobody knew and about which, seemingly, nobody cared. It was inhabited by some *café au lait* people, about whose views, because they were stained brown instead of being white, nobody troubled. It seemed, however, that, in the language of diplomacy, it was "a sphere of influence."

Thrum instantly thundered from his Fleet Street Olympus. Lanthorn blew his penny trumpet in reply. The man in the street paid his halfpennies and read it all as though the world and war were a penny peepshow. As time went on, he even developed a new-found patriotism about this sphere of influence, without having any precise idea as to where or why it was. Without knowledge of empire, he called himself imperialist. He took sides. Even the churches took sides. Church was on one side—chapel on another. But through it all, Thrum thundered.

There was a fluttering of flags. Questions in Parliament. The stirring up of old treaties. Men, ill-considered unimportant men throughout the world, and of all colours, prophesied, and like their predecessors the prophets of old were laughed at and forgotten.

Then Morocco vanished from the map of Europe as it vanished from the papers and was forgotten in a handspace.

It was in this time, when Europe, heavy, was travailing for the Event, that Deirdre stood in the grey of the morning before Finn, still half-asleep on his divan-bed, and bending over him hid her head within his arms.

"Finn," she whispered so low that he could only just catch it. "Finn," she said, as she pressed herself against him. And then after a little . . . "can you not feel it—can you not feel it stirring?"

A tremor came to him from her. It ran through him like a nervous shock. It was the new life.



## XXXIV

### THE CLEANSING OF TREVOR TITTERLING

It was a dark January evening in the House of Titterling. The leaden skies that hung above London had held their frozen mask throughout the short January day. The cold seeped through everywhere like some slimy thing trying to crawl its way into the house through each cranny.

Not a sound came from the outside. Not a note of bird. For the very sparrows cowered together under the icy eaves in trying to keep out the frozen death. Even the brood of the younger Titterlings in the attic above were frozen into silence.

Only one sound came to break the brooding heaviness of that soundless day. The sound of a woman's voice—a woman singing softly to herself as she moved about the house, sometimes coming in to watch her husband, sitting crouched tobaccoless before the tiny fire—a pale-faced penitent trying to read one of the black-bound books of the Elect.

She would come in as though about to do something and would turn her great grey eyes upon him as he crouched unlovely, with a stare that at times was terrifying. She would croon to herself as though over a child, looking upon him with that terrible tenderness and would then go out, closing the door softly behind her.

Trevor Titterling, sitting there, felt that stare, and careless devil though he was, it made him uneasy. Now he was listening to her go down the steps into the cellar underneath the house—that cellar hollowed from the solid ground, with the single barred window and low thick clamped door that bolted on the outside to prevent the thieves who in the night break through and steal getting into the house itself, the cellar in which the young Titterlings played at "bears and lions." He heard her raking amongst the coals and a little afterwards listened to the ascending steps which passed out to the side of



the house, and then the dull clang of the iron shutter which could be locked over the cellar window at nights.

Something seemed to echo in his soul as the dull clamp struck cold upon him. It was as though the door of a tomb had closed.

He shivered.

And then, inconsequent, his mind ran to that day some three weeks before when his train had stopped suddenly outside a station, a train in a carriage of which he had been making love to Joan Elliott, that young woman, the last of his light o' loves, to whom Finn had seen him saying good-bye that day of the dead years at Liverpool Street Station and who had now come back to him. He had always had a weakness for Joan. He had had the girl in his arms when that other train had stopped opposite his as though by the hand of God . . . and he thought the woman in the grey dress and grey hat in that other carriage was his wife. But he could not be sure. And he had been afraid to ask.

But she had gone that day up to town to see her mother—and it might have been so. Yet he had not seen her looking at them. He had not even thought of the train in his hot kisses and had only looked up to see the woman in grey, alone in her carriage, staring away from them and out of her own window. It could not have been she.

But Trevor Titterling was uneasy. "Had the creeps," he said.

His wife had been busying herself about that cellar for the last few days. He had asked her about it, but she had said something about separating the wood and tinder and coal which had become mixed together. He did not bother about that. He never went into the cellar. But there had been the sound of hammering—a dull sound as though something were being stopped up.

But what should be stopped up? Down there they had the cask of petroleum and some wood and some coal. Nothing more.

But Trevor Titterling was uneasy.

And still the crooning came to him.

Mary Titterling was singing those terrible hymns of the Spirit's Elect—those hymns of bitter-sweetness. They had always terrified him in a queer way as though they were the

spells of malignant implacable spirits. It was they which had frightened him into religion—that last fright of the mid-summer which, like all those other frights before it, had passed.

For Joan had come back to him. And Joan was adorably sweet and enticing, and the tides of life still ran strongly in his thin veins. After all, time enough for religion when Joan was gone and his pulses had ceased to throb.

If it were not that he feared those spirits. They would not let him escape. They were watching out for him—watching to strike him down at the very moment he felt most safe—to consign him to eternal tortures. They could not be escaped, or the Thing behind them. Trevor Titterling knew that.

He shivered again as he listened to the low clear voice singing now more strongly, with something aspirant, pleading:

But oh! the avenging fires of hell,  
That choke and scorch and writhe,  
    Whilst in the midst  
    The sinner sits  
In torment—yet alive.

For oh! the flames—  
    The cleansing flames—  
That purge the sinner's sin.  
    They burn the fear,  
    They burn the tear,  
They bring him heaven within.

But now she was silent. He could hear her coming up those stairs for the last time with that steady padding of the feet.

He could hear her outside the door. He saw the handle turn and then his wife as she came in, the grey eyes, luminous, bent upon him with a certain exaltation. But the glance of the eyes was terrifying.

There was nothing of which to be afraid. Mary would not look at him like that—with that pure-souled utter love of hers shining through the veils of her eyes if she were the woman who had that day been in the train. She knew nothing.

And he loved her. He knew that. He had not made his own body or the soul which it dominated. It was not his fault that he could no more make love to those clear calm eyes than to a vestal virgin. The Joans of the world were for the bodies of the world. The Mary Titterlings were for the souls.

She only wanted him to help her with the coals below. They were too heavy for her and a partition had fallen.

It came to him as a sudden relief. Of what had he been afraid?

She went before him down the cold stone steps. There was a pungent smell of paraffin.

She threw back the heavy door of clamped iron. He could see through into the murk of the place which was filled by a greyness as of a pit, the only light seeping its way through the holes of the narrow iron shutter now clamped in place.

A great pile of wood and straw had been swept together in the middle of the cellar, a mass of coal thrown loosely over and through it. It covered the centre of the floor, throwing grotesque shadows upon the stone walls. The smell of the oil was overpowering. The floor was drenched with it. He drew back a moment from the place as though it had been a place of torture.

He turned at the sound of the grating match, saw its fiery passage through the close cold air, and then its falling upon the pile. He looked, stupidly, as a tiny wreath of smoke curled upwards—and then he had found himself and had hurled himself upon the liquid flame that ran along the ground, writhing before him like a living thing. He beat and trampled frantically. But still the flames ran about him, their blue tongues licking hungrily upwards.

He turned as he heard the clamp of the great door behind and the shooting of the bolts. Hurling himself again and yet again against the wood and iron, leaving pieces of his flesh upon the iron studs. Breathless, he listened for a moment, hearing only the thudding of his heart and the spitting of the flames . . .

And then the voice. That terrible voice, crooning:

. . . the cleansing flames  
That purge the sinner's sin.  
They burn the fear . . .

He called. And now above the crackling of the flames he could hear her praying—praying behind that closed door:

"Oh, God! cleanse Trevor—cleanse him, oh Almighty Father for his soul's sake—cleanse him in the flames of hell. Cleanse

him from the things that clog—from carnal love—make him pure within like a little child.”

He flung himself on his knees against the door, fighting for air. He also prayed. He prayed her to open. He promised repentance, but still that terrible prayer went on beyond the door shut implacable as the door of a tomb: “Cleanse him, oh, Father! In thy Divine Mercy, purge him with thy purifying fires. Purge him for the children’s sake—for Christ’s sake

.”  
“Mary! Mary!” he cried.

But still the voice came, insistent, pitiless.

The flames roared, the prayer inside had sunk to a hoarse whisper.

And then the first long scream rang out—and then another—and then that dreadful animal whimpering.

And then, at last, silence, save for the roaring of the flames, now breaking through the door to turn the house of Titterling into a funeral pyre.

## XXXV

### THE BIRTH OF FINN

Finn Fontaine, visiting his friends upon that dark evening of January, had found only the gutted walls of the house about the glowing bed in which lay the ashes of the Titterlings. All except the mother, who had been found wandering around the furnace of the house crooning to herself, her eyes ablaze with madness, to be led away to her final home—the Broadmoor criminal lunatic asylum, “to be confined at His Majesty’s pleasure.”

He had come with a heavy heart because he and Deirdre now knew that the threat of two months before had materialised.

The little life of which he had learnt in the dawn of that morning had ceased to be life. It had almost ceased to stir in its gropings from the infinite to the finite. And so they had been troubled, and in their doubts had gone to a local doctor.

The case was not one with which he could deal, he had said. It was a case for the specialist. A certain sample would have to be submitted. Tests would have to be made . . .

But it had seemed to them there was nothing to fear. Deirdre had not felt ill. It was only that silence within—as of a tomb.

He had sat in the gloomy consulting room in Portland Place and had listened to the steady ticking of the clock in the silence.

And then the great man had stood before him, silent, as befitted an arbiter of fate. He had listened to the story of Finn as a man listens to an old tale—listened with his head resting in his hand—that soft white hand which yet had something pitiless in it.

Finn had watched his back as he held the sample he had brought in a tiny test-tube over the blue flame of the Buntzen burner—had watched the liquid contents turn to ink and had

felt his own heart become darker and darker with the play of the flame.

Then he had delivered judgment. Remorseless judgment.

Finn had heard him as from a great distance and as though he were not concerned in it. It seemed superfluous. For he had known it in his own way. He knew it as he watched the play of the flame and the poise of the man with the tube.

A gleam of pity, transient, came into the face of the man with the tube, passed, and was gone.

It was a curious case, he had said—in some respects unique, but it was not quite unknown. It was a case of sugar secretion—that sugar which, in the last stages, turned to deadly acid. Yes, Deirdre would have her child, but the child would be born either crippled or dead, and the mother would scarcely know of its coming. She would pass into a merciful unconsciousness—and with the coming of life there would also be a going—death was the corollary of life. She would pass out in that coma from which only one woman had awakened . . . And that was all.

Finn found himself listening with meticulous interest to the ticking of the watch in his pocket and noting a tiny vein that twisted itself across the large signet garnet upon the white hand before him. Then he had laid the five golden sovereigns and the two half crowns upon the table. He had placed his hand within the white hand of the man in front of him—the man who now had something strained in his eyes. And then he had found himself in the roar of the Regent Street traffic.

The thrash of the hoofs; the cry of the paper boys; the voice of the bus conductor as he asked for his fare—all came to him as from the other side of something—from another place, far away.

He had gone through the little green door to where Deirdre waited, all unconscious. She looked up from where she was working over some tiny garment under the oil lamp—looked up, to know the truth in that moment.

It was Deirdre who faced the thing that was coming with that new faith which sometimes seemed to Finn to hold all things. It was Deirdre, her little face framed in the halo of her hair under the oil lamp, who turned to him and kissed him—Deirdre who had sat upon his knee as he told her the whole story as he might a child. And it was Deirdre who had said:



"That is all right, Finn. You and I cannot fear—God is everywhere."

And then, inconsequent, she had broken down, hiding her face as was her way in his shoulder and crying softly to herself. "I don't want to leave you, Finn," she had whispered as though in apology. "But God is everywhere."

She had never before spoken of God—not in that way. Even in that moment, that came to him.

It was then that, still sobbing uncontrollably at intervals, she told him that whether life or death came, she wanted it to come in Ireland. It was in that moment Finn knew what country meant for Deirdre. "If little Finn"—she had always been sure the child would be a boy—"if little Finn were born anywhere but in Ireland, he would never forgive his dead mother." And so it had been decided.

They had come to Dublin to a home of which Mrs. O'Hara knew. When they reached the ancient Dublin mansion, it was like meeting an old friend. Finn remembered in some time or place the great kindly house at the corner with the door, so curiously unproportioned, at the side—the old low door of oak that had been darkened by the centuries, with the oak garlands carved out of the solid mass, and, above, the big brass knocker with the face of the cherub.

Inside, and he recognised the great stairs that wound themselves into the upper regions—the low gloomy reception rooms with the floors of polished oak—the white marble mantelpieces stained by age, and all the tender windings of the place. It was an old friend.

An old man, of thin bearded face and misty kindly eyes, was crossing the marble flagstones on his sticks as they came through, had looked at them a moment, and then had passed into a room at the side.

Deirdre, happy in the old house, had made friends in her own shy, impulsive way with the white-haired beautiful woman who had yielded marriage and children for the sake of others, and that first night had laid herself to rest with a smile of happy content.

But always that terrible acid increased—that malignant secretion that was to be fatal to her own life and that threatened the child within—the little life that struggled ever fainter as its time drew near.

And then that morning when Finn had come in to find the first travelling of life, and Deirdre, white-faced, with the tears shining in her eyes—unafraid.

"You will be with me, Finn, dear," she had whispered, still with that sad happy smile—"with me until the end—that is not an end but a beginning," she had added after a moment. She had pressed his hand in both of hers.

"There is nothing more to say, dear heart," she had gone on. "We have spoken of all and arranged all—and if I pass over you shall not long be alone, for you shall come to me soon—but not too soon, for you have your work to do and I shall be with you always. I shall be with you in the air you breathe and in the room at night—I shall be with you dreaming and waking. And some day you will see me as you see me now . . ." She had paused an instant, and then had said, in a whisper: "But perhaps God will give me the hundredth chance . . . perhaps he thinks you must not be left alone yet."

She gasped a little, her eyes shining with vision, as though she had searched the immutable and got her answer.

So he had been with her through the day—that day of pain. They had sat together like children, each clasping the other's hands—and when the pains had been too much he had placed his arm about her as though to shield her.

They had been together throughout the day until the moment when he had to leave her. She looked at him, in long dreaming, as he turned to go and she did not take his hand or say good-bye. He had turned at the door and then had closed it softly.

Downstairs in the great hall he found the gentle old man who with his sticks had sat below in the room with the big chair through the years. He had sat there through the years, crippled, and had prayed for those above him who gave new life to the earth. And there it was that Finn found him, the blue eyes looking on him with a great pity.

"Wait a bit," he had said. "Wait a bit, now. Sure, can't you leave a little bit to God?"

And there they had sat on either side of the great fireplace with the brass dogs, watching the dying embers in the unlighted room.

They had heard the trot of the horses' hoofs on the hard

road and the knock that had meant the doctor. They had listened to the steps ascending the stairs. And so the hours had gone by and Finn, to his bitter self-reproach, had found himself unafraid. In the darkened womb of the great house it seemed as though all things were enclosed and sure—as though a new philosophy were coming to him in the silence—a philosophy not of death, but of life—and yet of death, too.

He had ceased to think of the little white face lying up there waiting on the threshold where life and death meet—had, instead, come to think of her as something far away—not as Deirdre, but as a dear being he had once known and would always know.

Only the tick of the grandfather's clock in the hall came to them as they sat there in the shadows—youth and age. And once in a while, the old man's: "Wait a bit. Wait a bit, now. Sure, can't you leave a little bit to God?"

And then the steps descending the stairs.

The doctor stood before him in the open doorway with the flames playing on his white face—the face of a man who had wrestled with Death and who was being beaten, the red strong hair lying dankly across the moist forehead.

Deirdre was in coma. It was the beginning of the end assured. He had to be prepared.

But still that strange indifference, that almost terrible confidence filled him.

And then the steps going up the stairs again. And again the old man's recurrent: "Wait a bit—wait a bit now. You must leave a little bit to God."

And still the tick of the clock in the silence of the house. And once more the steps descending and the pale face standing again before him with a tiny spot hectic in either cheek, but this time the face of a man who had wrestled with Death and won. It was Deirdre's "hundredth chance."

"You can come now," was all that he said.

But Finn's heart rose within him to stifle. Up through the old house—up to that room where Deirdre, white-faced, the dank death-dews still standing upon her forehead—but smiling to him, smiling to him in that deathless way of hers.

And by her side a tiny creature lay stiffly, its eyes closed, but its tiny chest rising and falling.

Finn's heart leaped. It was their child.

## XXXVI

### THE STORY OF FINN

Finn looked down upon the morsel of life which the white-haired nurse had placed in his arms in a sort of wonder. The shrunken withered face seemed to him of the stuff of which gods are made. The eyes, now unclosing, that petered up to him unseeing, became for him the most beautiful eyes in the world—the tiny clenched fists and the shrivelled limbs, perished by that cruel poison, assumed for him dimensions more than mortal, and, as he held this soundless thing in his arms—for little Finn was silent from his birth—it seemed to him that the continuity of life upon the planet was assured through this frail combination of bone, blood and nerve.

Finn the little had to be placed before the fire in the lap of the nurse to keep alive the spark of life which had been awakened by the beating hands of the doctor. For little Finn had been beaten into life. He fought silently to live, lying there, eyes and fists clenched, the little straightened limbs set stiffly out before him. It was a silent, hateful fight as between two invisible enemies who grappled there in silence and darkness. The doctor said that little Finn could not live—no such child had lived—but night after night Finn Fontaine sat in the great chair between the bed of Deirdre and the tiny thing that fought its silent battle in the crib at the side.

It was the ninth night when Finn the little gave the first sign of life. It was a sneeze. To Finn, half dosing there in the dark night it came like the emission from a tiny piston, with steam behind. And in that moment he knew that the child would live.

And he did live. The little thing gradually came to life, its tiny arms still jointless but now pawing the air, the eyes opening more and more as the days went by, the pulse beating ever more strongly.

Finn the little lay there day after day, as, later, he lay through the months in the house with the green door. He lay there silent—sometimes they thought silently reproachful—with the big eyes now changing to dark, lustrous wonderment as they looked upon a strange world.

So the months went by—but little Finn was still silent. He lay there like a chrysalis in a cocoon, receptive to everything about him. He seemed to feel neither pain nor sorrow, but, as it sometimes came to his father and mother, to be looking out upon a strange world as an angel might look out upon the earth from a cloud.

For the first months he ate hungrily—and then turned from physical food as though it were distasteful—as though he had not the necessity of it.

Only, one evening in summer, Finn, coming in upon him where he lay in his crib, staring upwards as was his way, found the little mouth on one side, as though the muscles had only just relaxed for the first time, the face twisting into a smile, painfully. He was staring upwards at something with the great dark eyes that seemed to be peering into other worlds.

And from that moment, the little face would break into, first, a wry twisted smile, as though it hurt, and afterwards into the all-embracing welcoming smile that they got to know and which was his way of showing them how he loved.

At two years he was a child of shrivelled immovable body, but of beautiful glowing face, his life only showing itself in his eyes and in the little strained movements of his arms as though he were still fighting with things unseen.

It was towards the end of the second year that they heard coming from the tiny garden where he lay under a solitary pear tree, one spring day, a chuckle: deep, long, ecstatic. It had in it the lust of life; in its cadence something deep, satisfying.

They saw him lying on his back upon the little grass plot, chuckling deeply to himself as at some huge joke—sending out chuckle on chuckle to something to them invisible. Nor, as they found later, did he ever seem to distinguish between them as real and those other things, whatever things they were, as unreal. It often came to them that three parts of his life lay in the world of the invisible and only flickering moments in this



—but however that might be, to him both worlds were as one.

And when they had taken him to Ireland and had laid him amongst the daisies on the uplands of Carrickmore, he would lie there for hours by himself sending out those deep chuckles of content.

To show him a spotted foxglove was to bring from him happy sighs, and once down there by the sea where Deirdre had taken him upon her lap by the edge of the green waters, he had stared first at them and then at her, as was his way, his eyes luminous with love—for of all things he loved her most, and then the little strained arms had reached up towards her and he had tried to caress her, cooing in his dumb way.

She had bent down over him, brushing back the mass of his hair from his eyes and the tears had fallen fast upon the little face upturned, whilst underneath he trembled with joy as a flower in rain.

Finn could not sit up. He would struggle sometimes to raise himself, and his mother, placing a hand behind the crippled spine would help him to look out on the world from another angle—but even as the tiny body raised itself the little head would hang brokenly forward like a flower too heavy for its stalk and the eyes would fall, helpless. And they would think of the woman by the roadside of long ago and little Paudeen.

Once, from the high road below, there had come to them where they rested with Finn a tall woman clad in grey—a woman of white hair and the eyes the colour of her dress. She had looked at the child who lay cooing softly to himself under the foxgloves, whilst over his head a golden thrush sang out its soul before the Lord in the dusk of the autumn day. She had come over to the child, and Finn and Deirdre, as people expectant of some miracle, had looked long and earnestly upon her as they might have looked upon a saint of God.

She herself had gazed upon the boy, who had looked up into her face, a great glow suffusing head and neck as was his way with strangers. She had looked long into his eyes and then had turned to them.

“This child is not a human child,” she had said. “He is one of those others. The earth is not his dwelling place. He must go back to his own people.” In loving pity she looked at them and had passed downwards, disappearing at the turn of the road into the Irish gloaming.



For his father, little Finn had his own separate love. The eyes would follow him everywhere, and the tears—for he had learned to cry as he had learned to smile—would stand in his eyes as water over sun. He would lie in his arms with great sighs of content, and it would seem to Finn and Deirdre as they looked upon him that all their luck in the world lay with little Finn. He had been loaned to them. He was theirs and not theirs. They would say to themselves, half-laughing, half-believing, that, as the Black Rock wise woman would tell them, he had come to them as a child of the Sidhe or Fairy People—half mortal and half god.

And so all was well with them—or would have been well had it not been for a dead woman. For Deirdre could never forget Stella Fay, and it was Stella who first came between them—dead Stella.

## XXXVII

### THE STORY OF FINN (Continued)

In the beginning, after the coming of the child, Deirdre and Finn seemed to find a new unity in the frailness of the crib. The coming of Finn seemed to bind them together, the two streams of their being meeting to feed the flickering flame of life which now, after three years, seemed only to have been lighted to extinguish.

As they looked into the eyes which flamed from the cloud of hair that swept back and upwards into a halo of ruddy brown, it seemed to them that in that flame their own selves had found both their expression and their fulfilment. It seemed to them, as Finn sometimes said, that "their luck was bound up" in the child that could sometimes look like a Jesus-child, sometimes like a wild spirit of air—one of the Sidhe themselves.

He would lie in Deirdre's lap out on the purple hills of Ireland, looking at some dusky bee, heavy with honey, as he worked over the heather bells, sometimes falling into that ecstasy which found itself in those deep, pleasurable chuckles which seemed to hold in them all the zest of life. Or where, from some lofty headland, he hung brokenly, he would bend his eyes downwards from the arms of his fair young mother upon the shadowy amethysts of the swelling ocean, as though he would drink his fill from the depths. Or, as sometimes happened, he would lose himself from his bed of scented heather in the blue concave above him.

Finn and Deirdre in those early years had fought against the will that had doomed their child to silence and immobility, first with hope—then, with dull impotence—and then they had quarrelled.

It was partly the hopeless struggle down there in the house with the green door—the struggle to live. It was little Finn lying there the length of the days, soundless, and, as it some-

times came to them, reproachful. And at last it was the girl with the copper hair.

For there were times when Stella Fay seemed to drag her gliding halting presence across their most intimate moments. Her laugh came to them out of the shadows about the House of Dreams where they sometimes brought Finn to lay him in Mrs. O'Hara's arms.

They would let him lie out on the dappled grass, with Patsey, whose head as he became older, ever seemed to grow heavier for the slender neck—the child who had never grown up. For, outside his father and mother, of all creatures of human kind, Patsey was closest to him. They seemed to have a secret between them.

He would look into Patsey's wondering eyes of grey with his own—those great dark orbs with the golden-green lights that shone so assuredly as though he were very old and Patsey the youngest, or was it the oldest, thing in the world? and would smile up to him. And, except his mother, and more rarely his father, Patsey was the only human being he tried to caress with those poor broken arms, reaching up towards the great head.

But there was always the girl with the copper hair. And Finn would remember that day when they had laid her up there near the old chapel and Deirdre's passionate confession of fear: "Finn—she is living. Things like Stella Fay do not die."

The dead girl would come between them in the very moments when outer things seemed most remote, and they would catch the brightness of her hair and see the grey eyes with the stinging irises and the hooking vulpine nostrils.

Until that day when little Finn, hearing the bitter words between them, when Deirdre had reproached Finn with his memory of the girl, reproached him unfairly—for Deirdre could sometimes be very unfair in an angry, passionate way—had looked with troubled eyes into their faces, and to their haunting sorrow, the lips had drooped piteously and the child had uttered a cry that seemed to come from his heart. The tears brimmed in his eyes, and the little body shook with his sobs.

It seemed to them they had been sinning against the little child.

From that moment, it was as though the girl with the cop-

per hair had ceased to have power. From that moment, neither of them mentioned her, and Deirdre forgot that strange inconsequent jealousy.

Each felt that in some way little Finn and his suffering were essentials to their learning. Despite Finn's continued failures; despite the fact that they often, in the early days, and before Finn's name once more began to loom large in Fleet Street, were hungry and often wanted the ordinary things of life, or just because of these things, Deirdre and Finn were learning their lesson. In them was growing a linking-up with the things about them—that consciousness of continuity that was immortality—and with it, the love of the common things, the common people. But always consciousness, as dead men might find the shadowy things of death dispelling in the whiteness of resurrection.

It came to them ever more clearly that they were children learning in a great school, perhaps one of many—that their schoolmaster was life itself, or, as it sometimes came to them—little Finn, who seemed to be guarding a secret from them, a secret some day to be revealed.

They would look into the flaming eyes for their secret and would feel like very young children looking into the eyes of age. And with it all, love grew in them, love for each other and through themselves for all things, a love that in Finn, the artist, seemed to be turning to creation.

He now understood something which Father Lestrangle had once said to him. "God," he had said, "was in Himself complete and all-sufficient, but He was so filled with the yearning of love that His love turned to creation. So it was He called the world into being and, having called it, He yearned to draw it into Himself again."

Finn found himself impelled to give of his new-found consciousness and of the message that seemed, dimly, to be making itself felt through him, to the people whom he met. There came to him ever more strongly that love of his fellows, which seemed to proceed from his love for little Finn, mixed sometimes, now more rarely, with that loving-hate of old—there came the impulse irresistible to give that love to the world as a man gives off superfluous energy, to tell the world that love was the only thing that mattered—the only faith. It sent him out into the highways and byeways of life, sent him

amongst the poor and rejected of men, and, as it sometimes seemed, of God. But with this democracy of love there grew steadily in him the feeling of spiritual aristocracy, that quality of Deirdre's, or, as he put it, a desire for an economic equality combined with an aristocracy of spirit. Human beings were not the same. They were different—as they advanced, increasingly different. They were separated by chasms of spirit and mind which only love could bridge.

It was at this time that another Incident came to disturb the mind of Europe—another Moroccan incident as it seemed to most—something to be wondered at, to be talked over, and then to be forgotten. Europe rumbled. Thrum thundered. Only this time the reverberations did not die away—they became louder, with something banking up behind struggling to make itself felt, something that was dully coming to the minds of the common people—the dull menace of the coming fact—that fact which was to change the history of the world.

It was at this moment, big with fate, that Sir Raymond Hilary threw into the sere complacency of the Union of Scientists the second bombshell of the new school—following up that first bombshell of the years before flung by him into the ranks of the British Association, challenging the Concrete to disproof, declaring that in his hands he now held fresh and absolutely incontestable proofs of continuity of personality after death. Changing for the first time from defence to offence, he faced the grave and reverend doctors as One before him had faced them, doing so from the fastness of his presidential chair where his reputation as physicist alone saved him from the auto-da-fe of science, Hogge, first touching his forehead significantly, then finally lending himself to the eternal gesture of doubt which at the time had the shocked sympathy of the world of science, in his impotent wrath placing his fingers to the snub of his scientific nose and extending them before him, to be followed by Professor Dust, who gave his now famous dissertation upon worms as a sort of antidote to immortality.

The presses of the world began to stir with the new literature, vomiting over the now ribald, now believing, continents an old story in new forms, reducing the men of science to dumb amazement at the credulity of some, the superstition

of others, and the, to them, retrogression that seemed to be an unfortunate intrinsic of human development.

A prince of the pen, once agnostic, had made his famous recantation—his credo to the glory of the gods and the confusion of the concrete. The gods were calling, and, at the call, Man, the Atavist, seemed to be tumbling headlong into the the beliefs of the human twilight, now being called “the twilight of the gods,” from which, through the ages, he had emerged. It seemed as though his doom were to be the completion of the circle everlasting, the circle of the ascending spiral, returning again and yet again at the call of memory, returning to forgotten beliefs, although perhaps upon a higher level, returning to something that perhaps in itself was the eternal motor of this turning world. For had not man himself once been god?

And through it all, Europe rumbled.



## XXXVIII

### THE PASSING OF FINN

It was evening in the House of Dreams. The westerning sun had been sinking in golden shadows behind the ash-grove, throwing them into the house where a blue haze, luminous, hung, impalpable. The turf fire sent its blue smoke upwards, with sometimes the falling of a morsel sending a stream of sparks slanting thinly up the chimney.

The doors stood open, to show the cobbles of the courtyard, and through it, along the shafts of smoky light that filtered through the trees across the yard, there seemed to Deirdre, sitting there, to be an invisible thronging, whilst through the window, on the other side, the stems of the ash trees hung motionless, expectant, in the evening haze.

Amongst the shadows, Mrs. O'Hara, bent, moved a figure of gloom, her silver hair shining beatific in the luminous haze as she passed unquietly from room to room. Finn's form darkened the doorways as he moved restlessly from place to place. Patsey sat with his head in the chimney corner in the old way, sometimes moving to the door to look through the door of the verandah at the shadows across the courtyard.

Only Deirdre was motionless, bending over the little crib in the corner under the window to look at the light of her life, lying there to gaze upwards at her through the great eyes, now so transparent that she seemed to see through them into the world invisible.

Little Finn was passing out.

He had lain there throughout the day, had not wanted any more to play with the shadows on the grass, and had begged them silently to take him to his crib—the crib he loved so well—the little crib to which, by looking at it dumbly, he always asked to go when he was tired and the world was too much for him.

Little Finn was very tired.

She hung over him, watching his lips to catch a movement—those movements she knew so well. And still little Finn gazed up at her in that burning way, as though he would give her that message—tell them his secret.

Little Finn was not crooning this evening of shadows. He did not moan with joy in the way that he had when the shadows stole across his bed.

The little arms hung listless beside him, no longer reaching out to love and life. The little mouth no longer drooped in sadness; no more he whimpered his joy or his love. He lay there, only his eyes speaking, looking upwards as though to draw his mother down to him with that absorbing love.

It seemed to her that if he would but speak once to her, she could let him pass from her in peace. But little Finn was silent.

A thrush burst into song in the purple shadows outside, and looking up she saw behind the tracery of the ashes the sky flushed with rose, and above, one long cloud slanting black across the heavens, its edges touched with gold as though the gates had been opened and the golden floor were shining there behind.

And still little Finn seemed to be trying to speak—trying to tell her something. She longed for the message that did not come.

Once, his father coming in to bend over him, he turned his eyes to him to show him that he was not forgotten—but his business was with his mother—the mother under whose heart he had lain.

From outside came the lowing of a cow, the sound that always made his eyes laugh—but they did not laugh this night. Nothing for him now had existence save his mother, and the message he waited to give.

A lump of peat fell into the fire and a stream of sparks shot upwards into the void of the chimney. But little Finn did not turn his head.

His mother tried to give him to drink, but the tiny lips crisped themselves into that gesture of negation. Drink was finished for him. Everything was finished except the message.

The shadows were heavy in the room.

From outside came the cry of a wild bird as it flew homewards through the upper air. And now Deirdre could see the

eyes gazing at her in two liquid pools of flame, the light shining through them. The hair lay in lambent waves on the blue silken pillow that he loved.

But now the eyes seemed to be fading into the shadow gathering over the tiny face, as though something were bending over him. And looking, Deirdre saw that they had closed themselves, the eyes behind seeming to look through the veils of the eyelids.

The breath was very low now. She could scarcely see the movement of the tiny breast. Sudden terror seized her as she bent lower, fearing.

She bent lower still, looking eagerly into the face, now so tiny. Bent to catch the breath as it flickered back and forth—and then, terrified, because she could not feel its warmth upon her face.

And then, in the extremity of her fear, when she had reached her hand up to Finn, stading behind, the eyes had opened, the lips had moved once, twice, and then there came low, distinct:

“Mama.”

Little tired Finn had closed his eyes.

## XXXIX

### THE UNKNOWN GOAL

It was there over the cot with little Finn, the lips drooping with that smile, lying at last asleep as though tired out with life, that Finn and Deirdre knew now that death was but an incident of life—that there was no death—and with the knowledge found the hope that draws its stuff from the looms of immortality and faith. Faith had come to them there, beating upon them in great waves, the faith that is born of death and love.

They laid the tiny coffin up there under the shadow of the chapel, amongst the dead of a thousand years. Over the tiny mound they placed only a bunch of shamrocks and a little Irish cross of grey limestone, on it the two words:

Little Finn.

All those who had loved him in life came to follow him up there under the chapel. The child, whose loving eyes had drawn to him all those men and women. And with them the little children who had liked to come to him to look upon him and, as they said, “to get Finn’s blessing,” came and laid flowers upon him and watered the tiny mound with their tears. And so they had left him up there to the winds of God and the bounty of the July heavens.

Finn and Deirdre had returned to London on the eve of the Great War. The volcano of Europe was rumbling and was even beginning to send upwards the first of those pillars of smoke and fire that were to be the forerunners of the burning death. But democracy, with its blind hopeless faith, began to gather itself together in the path of Fate, to turn her from her goal—the Fate which could not be turned.

And now the common people were gathering themselves

over there in London, where the leaders of democracy had come from the four corners of the world this August afternoon to stem the lava of war. Every nation in Europe had sent her men and women—and there, in the great square, under the brassy August heavens, they had collected themselves, the common people, about the plinth, as a last forlorn hope gathers itself before the final charge that leads to annihilation.

Forlornly the leaders stood under their red banners, clinging to the foot of the column and looking out over the faces turned whitely upwards from under the grinning lions, crouching to spring.

There they ran in pallid eagerness to the farthest confines of the square, a welter of humanity, soundless, unprotesting humanity, gathered together like cattle preparing for the slaughter. Dumbly they stood, looking upwards to the swarthy bearded faces of the Latins and the fairer heads of Teuton and Englishman—gazed upwards at the red banners that dyed the altar of the plinth a bloody crimson under the glowing sun, as men who waited for a miracle.

Finn and Deirdre, climbing upon the plinth, saw stretching out before them that great dumb cattleyard; heard the whisper of voices sulking across the mass as the wind sulks through the trees; saw them standing in that light as though they stood 'twixt hell and heaven with the glare of furnaces blending with the golden light above.

Finn looked at them, standing with his hand in that of Deirdre, who had clung to him. He stood there to read the message of this great crowd of every nation upon earth, drawn together as for the last judgment, waiting only the trumpet of Gabriel. And still the sun beat down in torrid waves, from which came blasts as from the mouths of open furnaces.

He looked upwards into the brazen heavens, into which black clouds were coming, fighting, eating, their way into the heart of the sun, as though they would extinguish it—saw the hands of the clock upon the church on the other side of the square as the fingers of fate, and caught in the passing of the seconds the hush that even then was spreading over Europe. The silence that was so soon to be shattered.

As he looked, there came to him a great pity. These white-faced dumb creatures seemed to be awaiting something, no more able to help themselves than the ox under the sledge

—waiting for fate to do her will on them. And looking, there came to him a vision of the millions beyond—those waiting millions throughout the world playing their parts unconscious, waiting blindly like animals in the slaughter house of Europe.

There came to him the sweating nerveless millions who had preceded them—those millions who, like them, had died uncomplaining—theirs also the bloody sweat, the helplessness, the impotence of the unconscious. He thought of the unborn fecundating generations, also blind, unconscious. He saw them like their forefathers looking for a saviour—looking for one who should save them from fate.

And still the sun beat sweltering down through the heavy dust-laden air.

He thought of the men who had preached at them—of the men who had written for them—of the message that the chosen ones of the earth had brought, that had fallen upon ears unheeding—of the message that even now they were trying to bring as little Finn had tried to bring his. He thought of the blood and of the tears that such men and women had shed; how they had brought out life upon the earth in labour and tears—how they lived in tears—how they would die tearless.

There they stood, white-faced, staring upwards at the figures on the plinth—that light of neither earth nor sky beating down upon them in fiery baptism.

He thought of how these men had fought like beasts when man first roamed the earth—how they had been trampled on as slaves—had given their daughters and sons as flesh to their masters, as prey to that greedy Moloch that even now seemed to gape in brassy fire above them demanding sacrifice unending.

He saw them as one of those countless waves of beings clambering up from the waters that threatened to engulf them—wave on wave in line unending. He saw them falling as they climbed, the others passing over their naked bodies, all pressing on to the unknown goal.

He saw them staring upwards to a Figure above them—to that fate which seemed to beckon them to something—to life everlasting through present death. He saw them pressing in the ages to come, ceaseless, resistless under the Urge Behind, under that urge which could not be stifled. Climbing to the Unknown Goal.

Dumbly they stared at the figures on the plinth—dumbly.



And there was a terrible silence as of death, with life beating deep within, like a great heart.

From the tower of the church came four clanging strokes like the sound of hammer on anvil.

At the sound, a woman had sunk upon her knees on the plinth to pray—a poor, ill-dressed woman. Her voice came thinly over the multitude. Something ran through the mass beneath.

Again the voice came, thinly.

And then, with the light beating redly upon them as upon some sacrifice made ready, the multitude had begun to stir uneasily. The heads were moving in tremulous swatches as when the wind runs over the harvest corn, shivering under the sickle of the reaper.

And now the heart of the mass was moaning as some living suffering thing. And then all—the face of Jew and Gentile, bond and free, those about to sacrifice and be sacrificed, had lifted up there towards that high altar—lifted up there with new staunchless hope shining. Shining to the prayer of the woman.

“Love,” she said. “Love, oh dear God! love! Let there be love.”

Murmurous came the answering litany from beneath, as though all the tongues of earth were speaking—blending in one great voice.

And now the mass was swaying under the dusk-red light, as though wave upon wave were running athwart them. The murmur, rising and falling, was the pulsing of some mighty sea, instinct with power and life, dumb fate cradling the whole.

To Finn and Deirdre standing there, it came as a sort of voiceless chorus, all-pervading but noiseless—came as the scourge of countless feet upon the beaten roads of life, the footsteps of humanity shuffling onwards to the one, unknown goal.















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